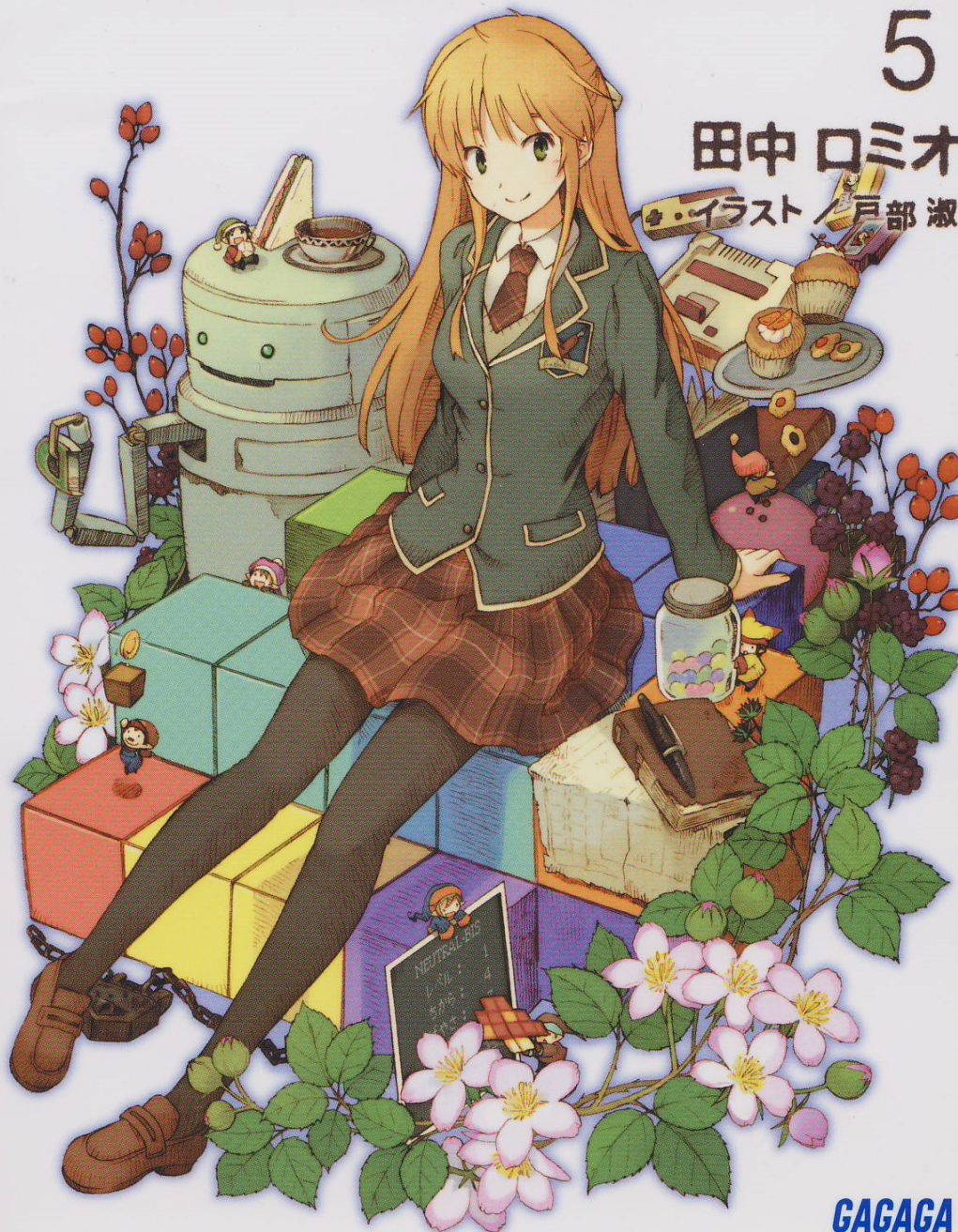


人類は衰退しました

5

田中ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑

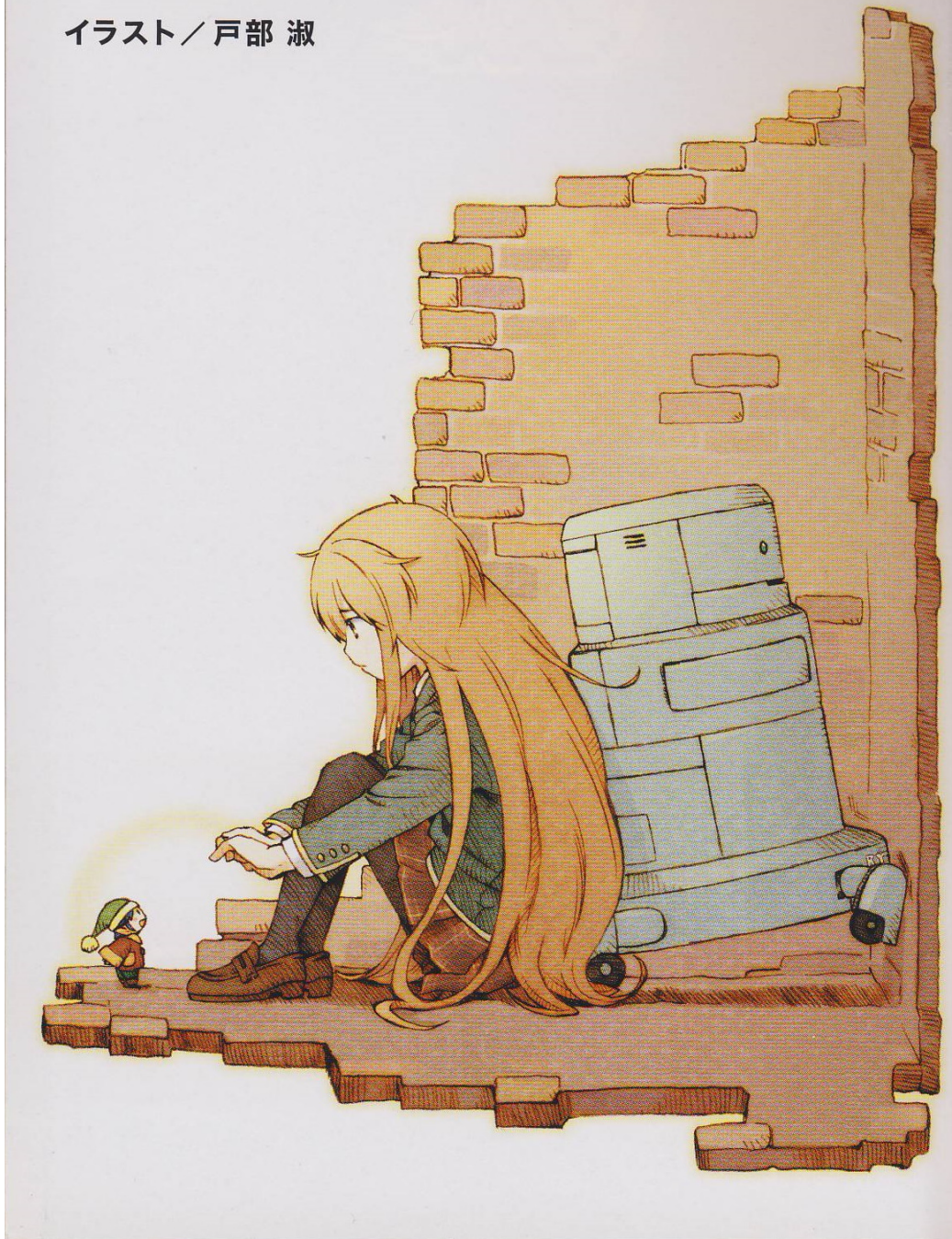


GAGAGA

人類は衰退しました 5

田中 ロミオ

イラスト／戸部 淑



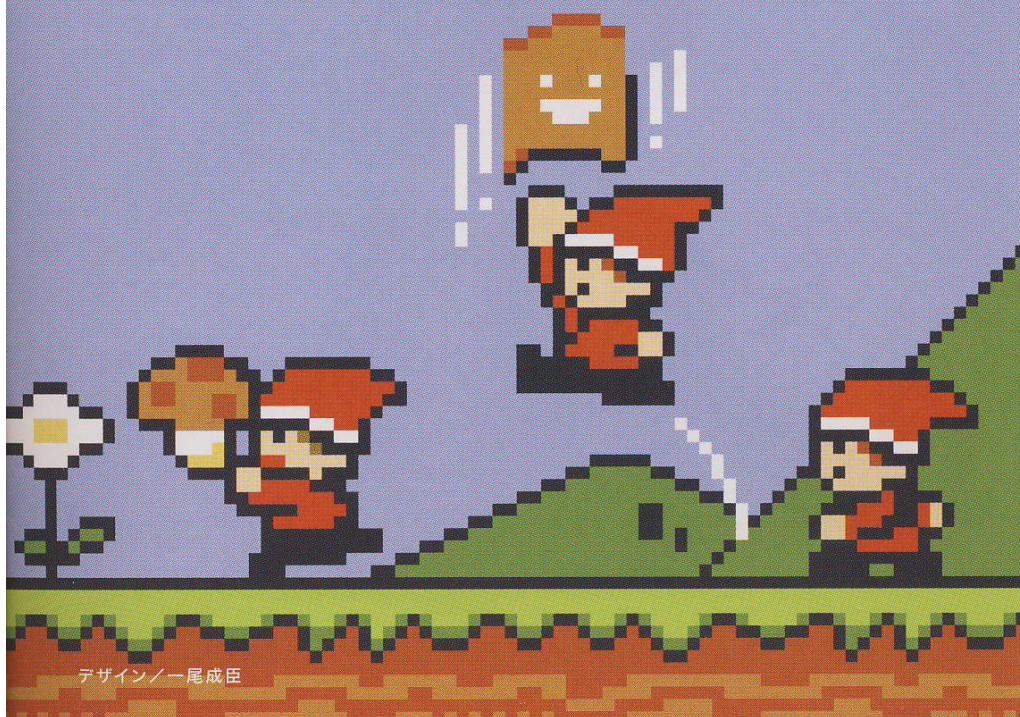
CONTENTS

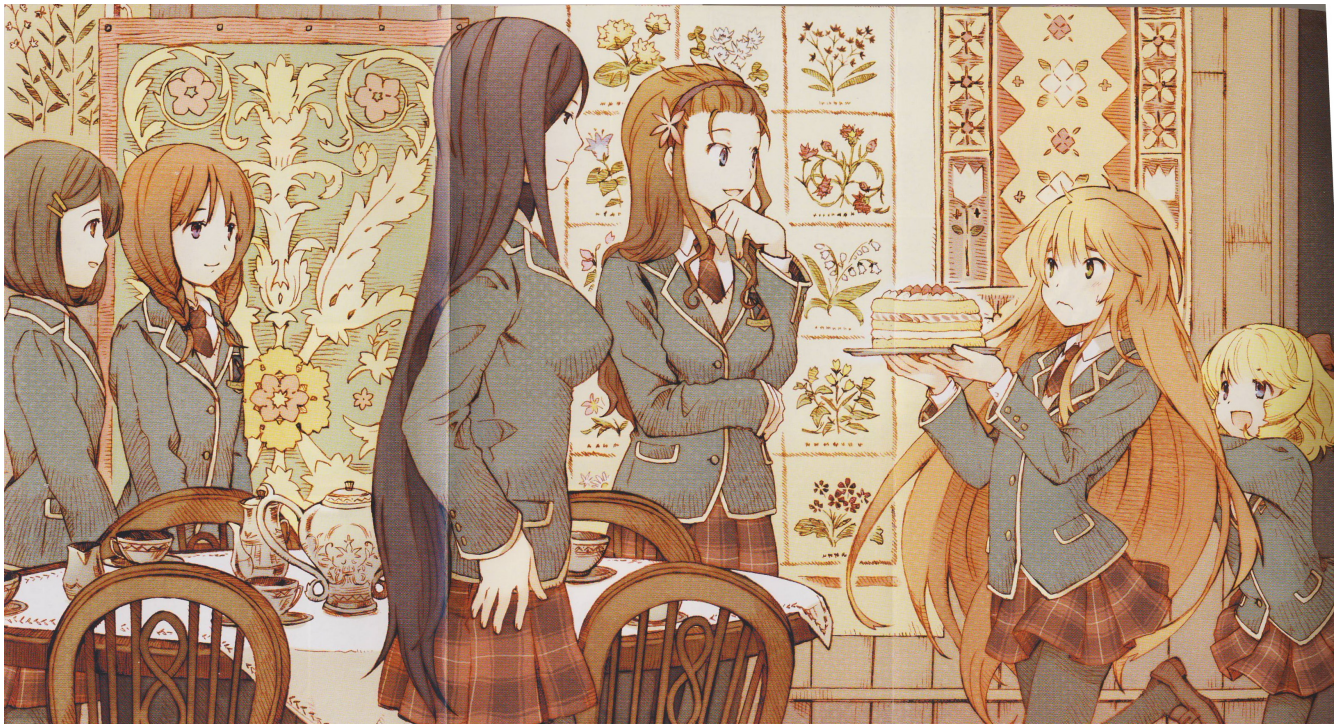
The Fairies and the Secret Tea Party...8

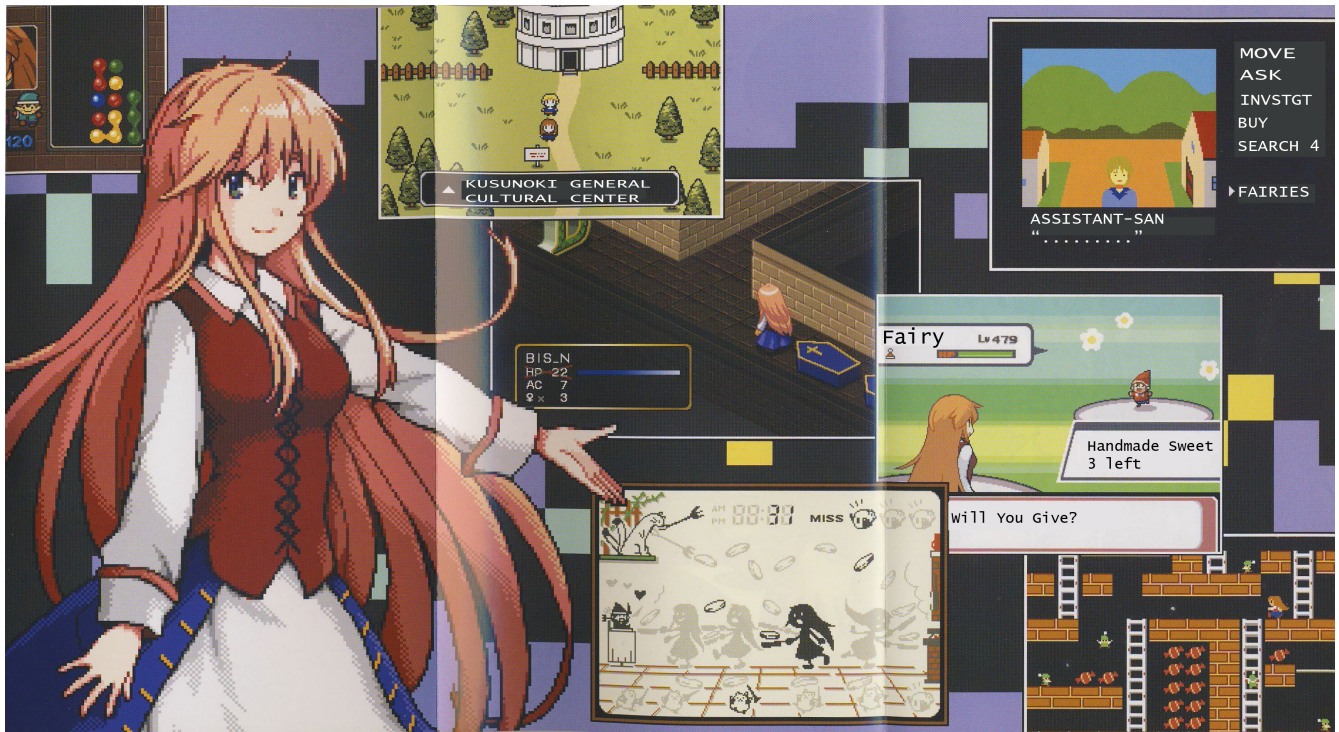
The Fairies' One Hour a Day...82

Periodic Report - August...141

Afterword...142







人類は衰退しました

5



MAIN CHARACTERS

主要キャラクター

Protagonist (Watashi, "I") Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. **Fairies** at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village. **Assistant** a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village. **Y** a girl the same age as Protagonist. Slender of face and physique, an attractive silver-haired lady.. **Curly Hair** A girl the same age as Protagonist's. She follows the older Protagonist around like she was her older sister. **RYOBO230r** A cultural assistance machine that supports the life of people.

From the Back Cover

Humanity Has Declined 5

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. Before assuming this position, I spent the majority of my time at mankind's last educational institution, The School. The friends I met at the dormitory... RYOB0230r... Wild Rose Society, the secret fraternity... it is much too early for sentimentality, why am I remembering these things...? Invaders have appeared in the Village! We formed a capture party, descended underground – and died?! Dling dling♪! Continue?

妖精さんの、ひみつのおチャカイ
The Fairies and the Secret Tea Party



Beginning

"How're you feeling?"

One of these fairy creatures... correction, people, jumped up on the desk and asked me that. I gave him a fabricated smile.

"Very fit."

"Are you, reeeally?"

The fairy tilted his head and jumped down, running away to who knows where like a rat.

"...so now they are worried about my health."

I was in my room, so was it unacceptable for me to groan?

Or maybe it was because I still had my forehead crumpled...

These days, I kept feeling something wrong deep within my ears, maybe in my eardrums or maybe in my semicircular canals.

A scrunch-scrunch sound like paper being crumpled, it just never stopped.

Were they the whispers of angels?

It was nothing that hindered my life, and I forgot that sound when I was busy, but once I noticed it I could not help feeling irritated.

Being unable to ignore it anymore, I went to a doctor.

"There seems to be nothing wrong, but it looks like you are full of earwax. If you don't have an ear operation you will die."

"What!"

I considered the term 'operation' to be completely extraneous to me, a word that belonged to a distant world.

Next thing I noticed, I was restrained face up on a bed and a wheeled cart made rattling noises as it was pushed before me, neatly lined with tool-like things that had sharp edges, tools on which the unashamed weight of the term Operation most certainly laid.

No anesthesia. That statement came from the doctor right before the surgery.

Stop. My statement was ignored.

The doctor looked like he was having fun, very much fun, as he thrust his tools into my ear.

A number of sharp-tipped metal stick were stuck in, and with motions like cutting a steak with knife and fork I was made to hear ferocious scrap-scrap twist-twist noises for twenty minutes per side, total forty minutes.

When I was released at last, I was spiritually exhausted.

It was just that my ears had become perfectly clear, and I could in fact hear things better. It felt that I did understand all that.

It was also that even after that I kept hearing the whispers of angels.

I simply did not notice them.

When I returned to my room I noticed that the fairies' hidden village was in an uproar for some reason.

Recently, the fairies had established a hidden village in my room.

It was located right in there, exactly under the bed, halfway through the path that connected the two mouse holes in my room. It was a tiny town made under my bed.

As I could hear the residents' voices when sleeping, I did not quite notice the whispers of the angels.

The reason why it was more bustling than usual was quickly established.

"A neighborhood association trip?"

"Yes sah!"

The organizer fairy answered that.

The fairies that were to depart were all ready for the journey.



"My, what a carefree thing to do."

"...we even got people with travel sickness."

"So, where are you going?"

"What's where?"

"No, I mean the place... a mountain, or maybe the sea."

"We won't know until we get there?"

"What, truly?"

"What do you say?"

He asked me, but...

"Well, do have fun..."

"Expect a souvenir!"

I had the feeling that this group would forget to return as soon as they left and never come back.

If that happened, who would dispose of the hidden village when it had turned into a ghost town, I wondered.

"We gooo!"

And so the fairies went on a voyage... or so I thought.

However, I did not have any memory of any of that.

Perhaps they got lost in my very busy days and I forgot, or maybe it was because the parting did not leave me much of an impression.

The instant it had become quiet, my room felt somewhat cold, and as I was having my tea in lonely silence, I came to do something quite unlike me and reminisce about my past.

There were only two types of memories that I had of my past.

Those of my childhood and those of my school life.

The School

"Hoh, so that happened. But there's no need to worry! All the kids who come here come out well raised. It's been clear white that they would come to be like that since far in the past. Who decided it, you ask? That was decided by the past principals, whom I have never met, long before I became the principal of this school. How far in the past, well, the records have been lost and we can't tell, but see, it might be as old as the curl in the head of that fat man in the portrait hung in the music room. And so, young lady, there's no need to worry now that you've come here. Having complicated circumstances makes you the same as anybody else.

There's no need to be depressed thinking you're the only one who's different in here. Just learn all you want, get stronger, and spend your time leisurely."

Like everyone else who lived in this era, I, like most people, had also lived a life of vicissitudes.

My parents had both passed away, and Grandfather was my sole and only family.

However, at the time between Grandfather and me there were no reciprocal feelings. All that laid between us was a paleness like the frozen air of Winter.

I believed that Grandfather was wondering about my education.

Wondering as to whether to carry it out by himself or to leave the matter to a specialized educational institution.

There existed two specialized educational institutions.

In the center and in the south, one each.

The one I was sent to was the southern one.

My life with Grandfather was one of pure strictness, and honestly it was also painful.

Yet I still expected it would be far better than being sent to some unknown faraway place.

It was more than reason enough for a child to close her heart.

The School would be the first I would frequent.

However, I had no expectations about it.

"Age... mh-hm, you'll be enrolling partway through. Things like these happen. But there's no need to worry. You'll be just a little behind others. Being a first grader at that age might feel awkward in the beginning, but well, if you do your best you'll move up to your appropriate school grade right away. I was the same! I was truly a blank sheet back then."

The principal's words seemed to have no authenticity, and I had a prediction that said that this was going to hurt.

In a classroom where only I was older, where all the children around me were little as per the school grade, not feeling something wrong would be odd.

It was gloomy.

Life, classwork, the future, I saw everything as gray.

I lacked even a single thing that I could enjoy. It was like all those once-rosy colored things had vanished to the last, together with my parents.

I did not want to grow up prim and properly.

And living leisurely was truly a faraway dream.

All those things I, at that age, had mostly given up about.

Regardless of how my age did not even reach the double digits, at the time I was a terrifyingly pessimistic person.

<Memo>

In this era where the decline of birth rates was followed by combined education, a unified education system with a dormitory is common.

We assemble children as young as five-six years old and as old as about twelve, and carry out younger / middle / higher education at separate levels.

Students start from the lowest and first grade and reach the highest grade, the sixth.

Advancement is decided not just by age, but also by scholarship and in consideration of individual circumstances.

Children raised in farming families still have impressive learning skills.

The children who needed to help their families with work as soon as possible were passionate

and dedicated to learning, so they could keep skipping grades and have their period of schooling reduced.

Although we have this school age system, there are individual differences in the absorption of education, and still, in particular in this age of extreme contraction in number of students, this was an idyllic scene of education.

"At present, eighty seven students are learning here," explained a young and thin teacher without even looking back at me as I walked behind her. "You will be the eighty eighth. You are all boarders."

That teacher's walking was oddly quick, she would not show consideration for me and slow down her pace.

Classroom, audio-video room, music room, study room, library.

The explanation of the teacher that had been ordered by the principal to show me around consisted only in briefly stating a name every time we approached each location.

A vastly different behavior from that principal who seemed so mild-mannered. I felt a little bit of disappointment inside my heart.

The teacher's attitude, and the business-like explanation, and the very gray school building, and the cold dry air, and everything else I felt distant. No matter how well I was taken, I did not believe this school would give me good memories.

It was as I predicted...

Without saying words, I sneaked a sigh.

This made my contrarianism worse.

Being chased out of the house by Grandfather had made that disease of mine even worse.

And that was why I was completely unable to hold any expectation even from this thing called school.

I had decided that there could not be anything fun, not even here at the start.

Spending time in this cold school building would not be significantly different than living in a wet cave of bare stone, I felt.

"You'll be studying starting from the first grade. It's gonna be hard being surrounded by younger people, but since you started late, this is natural."

The teacher said something that intentionally put me in a gloomy mood.

Right.

I was soon to be ten years old, but like the majority of children in this era, I had never attended a school. And that was why I was forced to start from the very first grade.

All of this was gloomy.

"Still, we do allow for skipping grades. If you do things diligently, you'll advance to a grade that's suitable for your age and knowledge. It all depends on you."

Even if that was going to be just a few months later, it did not give me any hope, you see. For a child, even a week was the distant future.

"Anything you need about the explanations so far? Right, miss... miss..."

And there the teacher checked the register. Faster than those dried lips could read out my name, I briefly opened my mouth.

"No, there is nothing at all, sensei."

That was the very first get-along that I had learned in my life.

Riddles

The School was located in a land that was hard to reach.

The area around it was said to have been a thriving city in the past, but the last residents had passed away many decades ago, so it was now like an island in the middle of the continent.

The town was being covered by vegetation, and the sole and only buildings that were maintained were the school building and the related facilities, a truly sloppy situation.

That being said, however, even just that area was pointlessly large.

"Now then, I'll show you the facilities outside the main building."

We left the main building and came to the wide garden where stout elms had been planted, and further beyond them there were the sports ground and the old stone-built chapel.

We made the rounds in order of the storehouse, the greenhouse, the cricket field, and the clock tower.

I could only think that all these facilities would have nothing to do with me.

And so, as last,

"Come now, this is the dormitory. Everybody learns the rules for communal life here. This will be the first thing you learn here at The School."

A wizened old wooden building towered before my eyes.

As I headed towards the room I had been assigned I suddenly found myself at a loss.

That was because the room was sealed away with chains and a padlock.

According to the teacher's instructions, a decision had been made to make it out of the question for the students living in the dormitory to lock their rooms. However, that should have nothing to do with padlocking.

That was because the chain obstructed entry into the room from the corridor.

It was a suspicious thing.

The chain and the padlock were both covered in rust, they were really old things. It was like they were improvised with things dug up from the ground and used as they were.

Robust they were robust. I pushed and I pulled, but the door did not open.

What was all this, there must be some mistake, but when I thought those things, a tiny memo that had been slipped inside the chain floated down to the ground.

The key is on the other side of eternity.

It was a riddle.

Memo in hand, I stood stock still in that spot for a while.

In short, this was hazing.

Likely from someone living the dormitory.

The last words of the teacher, to the meaning that I will begin learning in the dormitory, suddenly came to sound cynical.

Of course, I did not believe that what she had said had this as meaning.

If I withdrew, cut across the center garden where a cold wind was blowing harshly, went to the main building, approached that cold teacher, and shed a tear or so while lamenting my distress, it could be possible that the problem would be easily solved.

This challenger that I know nothing about would brand me as a boring girl, and I might be able to live my school life in relative peace.

That would not have been bad.

Given that I was not having one whit of fun.
But despite that, for some reason that was not a choice I was inclined to.
I grabbed the chain and tried pulling.
Although rusted, it did not quite seem likely to come apart.
Now then, well then, where was the other side of eternity?
My feelings were very spontaneously lured in by the riddle.

The Imps of the Clock Tower

I had no particular difficulties with the riddle.
Within the school grounds, there might possibly be some place that connected with
Something About Eternity that I knew nothing about... but I did not think about that in the
slightest.
I just headed straight for the clock tower.
As eternity was a stopped time, the clock tower was certain to be broken.
And in the end, the two hands on the clock face high up on the clock tower were indicating a
time far removed from the actual one.
The other side of eternity. The other side of the clock face was the very first place I had to
investigate.
The iron door to the clock tower opened without creaking. It was evident that it had been
oiled, and that someone made use of this place on a daily basis.
I climbed the spiral staircase, and as I was about to reach the top... I withdrew.
I left the building and hid myself.
Right after that, a group of boys appeared from inside the clock tower.
The boys were a little younger than me – they had malicious-looking faces – and totaled five.
They kept poking each others' sides as they kicked the iron door closed, then departed for
who knew where with satisfied faces.
They had school uniforms... they were students at The School, indeed.
Had I encountered them face to face, I did not believe that it would end without them picking
on me. I felt relieved.
I cautiously waited for them to disappear and once again stepped into the tower.
I climbed the spiral staircase, headed for the top.
There were a good number of planks ready to be used as footholds in order to perform
adjustments.
I see, this was a spot for hanging out.
The wooden boxes were clearly set out for several people to use as seats and desks, and in
the nook where blankets had been stuffed in there were cards and rackets.
They might have been coming back soon.
I hurriedly inspected the back side of the clock face.
I discovered a second memo.

**Splendid job avoiding those imps, however the riddles still continue. The animals know
the location of the key. But be careful! It can only be found on the day the disease gets
worse.**

I stared hard at the memo for a while.
Having left the clock tower, I walked sluggishly like a frog with indigestion, ponderously

heading towards the main building. I entered the building, headed for a certain room that I had just been shown... then stopped my feet, worried for a few seconds, and decided to turn back. I went back to the front of my room in the dormitory building and sat down on the wooden floor.

I could solve as many riddles as I wanted, but it would be pointless.

The instigator would be capable of tossing me around forever. I can solve the riddles but the key may never be given me. Once I solved enough riddles, it might be that I will be made to pick up a dead rat in the end. I could easily imagine how miserable I would feel then.

I was just being bullied.

By someone I had never met once.

Feelings of helplessness welled up from within my heart.

I put my forehead on my knees and focused on smothering my dark feelings. I did not have the willpower to do anything else.

The Dorm Mother

My belly made a noise.

I had been sitting there with my face pointed down, not moving in the slightest, for several hours.

Now that lunchtime had ended, the students of The School passed past me. They walked past me while exchanging whispers.

There was no possibility that this would not become a rumor.

However, it was too much of an annoyance to even talk to them.

One of them may even be the person who locked me out...

Even when a few timidly came to talk to me, I ignored them all.

Them / I. A line drawn which meant a relation of hostility.

However, I considered that white line of hatred to have been drawn by them.

I did not want to give in. I wanted to reject them.

I did not want to go along with the rules of others, and I would also pass on crying and telling them off. However, all I could do was sit down and reject them.

I knew this was a childlike resistance.

But what else could I do here, on Away Ground?

Eventually it grew dark outside, and people vanished from the corridor. Lights out time approached.

I could remain sat down like and disappear. It was a half-true wish. But humans disappearing was not possible.

And that was why it was certain that a bad conclusion awaited if I continued to be stubborn.

A pitiful, sad, painful end, perhaps.

I did not believe I could withstand that suffering.

Then I should just... go away somewhere.

Did those trees I could see from the window lead to woods?

If I went outside and walked I would find many worlds that did not belong to people. Even if I went hungry and died, it would be much better than being hazed.

The call of the night was quite strong.

And I... ended up smiling.

Why, how silly.

And at the same time I also cried.

It was pitiful.

"This damn thing."

I took the memo out of my pocket and tore it to shred, scattering the scraps on the floor.

My mood did not improve at all. Right, the hollowness of always remained hollowness.

Humiliation continued being humiliation, of course.

A despair deeper than the night rose its moist water level.

"...sigh."

I wondered if I could manage to keep up with this despair once I became an adult. It was all really unbelievable.

Once I was done being dejected for a while, I saw something like a will-of-the-wisps approaching from beyond a corridor dripping with darkness.

The thing was so surreal that I half-stood up, watching carefully what was happening.

The green light flickered as it came before me.

"...is this..."

Something cylindrical about an armful in size. Perhaps equilibrium was considered important, as it was low in height. The body was of a lasting synthetic resin. The green will-of-the-wisps was an optical device. Unmistakably the remnants of the wisdom of humanity.

It was a robot.

"First time I have seen one..."

I forgot my situation and persistently touched about the surface of the robot.

"You are in violation of dorm rules."

"HyEh!"

The robot suddenly made a warning sound as it declared that.

"Walking in the corridor after lights out is forbidden by dorm rules. Please have a citation.

Please receive the appropriate punishment from the teacher in charge within a week."

A thick piece of paper spat out from the robot's lips (?). It was a yellow ticket.

It was the sole and only item that bound the world of humans with a world that was not of them, I thought.

"Please return to your room. If you do not heed to the warning, I will exercise force."

It said something violent.

"Uhm... I cannot get in..."

"Please return to your room. If you do not heed to the warning, I will exercise—"

"Seriously, there is a chain and I cannot go in!"

I rattled the chain that was sealing the door to show him. I did not know whether the robot could make a high-level judgment of that sort, however.

Then the robot's eyes (?) started flickering quickly.

The green switched to red, and I could tell that it was investigating the area around the doorknob.

"I am RYOBO¹ 203r. A cultural assistance machine that supports the life of people. You can choose colors from pearl white, light blue, and mint green. I am RYOBO 203r. A cultural assistance – analysis complete. I will recover the foreign object. Should it require effort I would please ask for assistance."

"Huh...?"

A manipulator came out from the body of the robot that called itself RYOBO.

It thrust the multipurpose tool on its tip into the lock, and after a few seconds, the padlock was

1 A pun with 'dorm mother'.

all too easily picked and tumbled to the ground.

"A-, amazing... but..."

RYOBO collected the chain and padlock by vacuuming them up from the bottom, and just like that vanished off into the corridor.

"...just what is this place?"

It was a boring and dreary room, nothing worth sealing up.

The furniture within consisted only of a double bunk bed and a desk.

On the desk there was a bound book saying Procedures for Dormitory Life.

I quickly skimmed it and found detailed descriptions of how to use the bathroom and the cafeteria. Those late for dinner will get no food + have to give a written apology. With a sigh I chucked away the book.

I set down my luggage and tossed myself on the bed like that, and the ease and the warmth promptly dragged me into the depths.

Y

The morning meal was had in the cafeteria.

Morning was an easy thing, with a buffet and no trace of teachers, but dinner was quite strict, and teachers and all presents both were ordered to act in perfect unison. As a link in the chain of education.

The rumor was that it was a time set aside for students with unruly mouths to learn how to feed themselves.

The teachers' plates were cleaned out by someone in charge, but the rule was that the students had to clean out their own plates once they had finished eating.

In this cafeteria where perfectly ordered behaviors were enforced, only during post-eating clean-up did the students' actions abandon order and grow discomposed.

"Excuse me."

"..."

A girl with silver hair bumped into me, making me drop my tray, which seemed to be timed just perfectly.

The lightweight metal plates sang a loud sound as they tumbled on the floor.

For just an instant I gathered the attention of the cafeteria. There was a silence like a ravine in between traffic.

I stopped over and picked up the plates.

I immediately understood that the way that this girl with silver hair bumped into me concealed a bit of malice. I also disregarded her purely formal apology.

I was lucky that the plates after dinner were empty.

Even as I was picking up the plates, the two slender legs did not move away from before me.

...I hoped that this was not going to become a problem.

In the few days since I had become here I, at present, had not become close to anyone, and in exchange I had not been targeted by anyone. I spent a leisurely daily life as an older first grade student.

The difference of three-four years with the children clearly manifested in a difference in stature. In a classroom where the near totality of first year students were five-six years old, I was literally a head taller.

And so, being that the girl's height was nearly the same as mine meant, in short, that that the possibility was good that she was a senior of my same age.

I wanted to run away before this became a problem.
However, the suggestiveness of the gaze being poured on me from above my head made me uneasy.



That was the gaze of someone looking at a toy, no mistake, and as I felt that I was being observed with rudeness, something nasty spread wide within my breast.

Slender legs...

The girl was thin, to the point that I wondered whether she was malnourished or something. Her pale face was unnatural, as if artificial, however her lips were twisted in latent meanness. She had a cold smile the likes she could make at any time.

I could tell at one glance that she possessed a sense of values completely different from mine.

Due to her short hair and her body being angular and bony, I saw her as a boy for a moment. I picked up my dishes like nothing had happened and gave her my back.

"This thing here you forgot, right."

"What?"

An old key was dropped on the tray.

This key... could it be...

"You solved the first riddle so I thought you would be worthy of notice, but... you're a boring girl."

And with a snort,

"Broomhead!"

She kicked at my posterior and walked away.

I could not react in any way.

I could only shiver in shame and humiliation.

Without a mother or a friend to cut my hair, I could only cut them myself. I had neither, and so they were left growing endlessly, and the hairs jumped out, leaving me looking as if I had worn a broom.

It was something even I noticed.

But having that shouted before others, and loudly, truly shocked me to the point that I froze up.

It was only much later that I learned that she was famous as being one of the school's problem children.

Educational Plans

"...and that's why you must possess both physical and mental strengths, inherit a noble spirit that aspires to comprehend the arts, and cultivate a civilized personality."

At the start of the week we all gathered in the auditorium and were spoken like that by the principal.

These were the educational principles touted by The School.

As the talk more or less always grew long, there were none who seriously listened to it. Even in the teachers' row I could see several stifling yawns in their mouths.

With everyone dazedly letting their thoughts wander, I was the only one to focus on listening. And then I tried scrupulously analyzing how far reality and ideal matched and how far they were separated.

This 'cultivation' I looked up, and it meant to grow up slowly but steadily.

I see, that was certain, the education period at The School was quite the long thing.

In this system of advancement from ability, beginning from the first grade and ending with the highest and sixth grade, it was even plausible one could spend a maximum of nearly fifteen years at The School.

Education from elementary school to high school had been compressed down to these six grades.

The so-called university education system had collapsed long ago, and had been absorbed by them.

Advance was determined by skill, so one would not go up grades once a year.

Skipping grades was possible, but remaining in the same year was also a possibility.

Remaining in the same school year for many years was also possible.

Or rather, advancing one grade in one year almost never happened, that was the standard.

During enrollment there were variations in consideration of one's family situation, but for the most part, one entered at five or six years old.

Age and school grade did not have much relation, it was said.

That being said, when someone enrolled as late as I, the difference in age was of course conspicuous.

Sitting in the back of the classroom, it was easy to tell that I was an exact head taller than everyone else, quickly fostering a height complex.

In the first year classroom there were fourteen students. A total of eighty-eight in The School.

The trend was that students would decrease year after year, and even though combined with other education institutions that had remained within the country, it just barely managed to miss having two hundred people in total.

I concluded that education at The School would never fully carry out its ideals.

Physical and mental strength would turn into violence and cunning, the noble spirit would turn into high pride, each would be replaced as they took root.

The majority of students enjoyed their adolescence to their pleasure, to call it, they were savages.

"Civilized humans, whatever happens to them, must grow through reason. They cannot be embarrassed by an immature mind or heart. For example, bullying is the behavior they should be most embarrassed by..."

I saw the older students in the back row face the younger students in the front and fire pebbles at them with slingshots.

Curriculum

There were some things done in the classroom, and there were also things carried out in the library.

What was being taught in the first grade was reading, pronunciation, arithmetics, and history, all at a basic level.

The principal held lessons of his own, and there were many formerly retired teachers who had been invited from outside.

I received higher grades than anyone else, but it was rare that anyone would praise me for that.

When noon came, the students in charge carried in lunchboxes.

Food consisted of sandwiches, cheese, and fries, all light foodstuff without ceremony.

Students did not go back to the dormitory, but each had lunchbox in hand and ate in whatever place they liked.

There were many who brewed tea and sipped it.

I always ate in the classroom alone.

"Excuse me... if you'd like, we could eat together?"

It did happen that a fairly pretty girl with golden hair talked to me like that.

I did believe I had heard her name once, but I did not recall it.

It was just that her splendid golden hair's curls dangled from her ears like croissants, so inside of me I dismissed her as Curly Hair.

She was the student that gathered the most attention in the classroom, the representative so to speak, or to put it in common parlance, the most popular.

She was constantly surrounded by a number of friends, and there was a very vivid air in the classroom that said that a crowd beyond those desired from the bottom of their hearts to be around her, if possible.

Also, Curly Hair, like the majority of popular people, had a seriously good head and the top grades in the class.

Oddly curious as she was, Curly Hair often came to me when I was alone.

That said, no matter how many times she spoke to me, the response I had was always the same:

"I like being alone."

Afternoon was when cultural activities such as gymnastics and the arts were carried out.

Basic stamina work, sports, drawing, singing, poetry, classics, movies, and more.

The majority of the students enjoyed the afternoons more than the mornings.

To me it was pain in the posterior.

On Saturday afternoon we even had a cricket competition.

Cricket was a designated contest in which all the students participated.

It appears that in the past it was a competition between the various dormitories, but in the present, where there was only one dorm house, it was encouraged to belong to one of the five teams that were relics of that past.

Whatever student it was, they were generally introduced to upperclassmen by someone else, received a purely formal test, and without exception allowed to join a team.

Also, without joining a team one could not display the skill they had gone to so much trouble to have, so it was normal that first year students made great effort to search for an intermediary to let them join whichever team they wanted.

I did not join any and continued practicing alone in deep silence.

Curly Hair came to me as I was doing so and kept talking about something.

"E-, excuse me! Will you join our cricket team?"

Dorm Life

To visualize the group life that was living in the dormitory, I will say that, back in the distant past, it was normal for boarding students to be packed six per room.

Learning to leave a communal life was a very good part of the education.

But as it happened, as the generations passed the number of students rapidly decreased, the six people per room was abandoned and the standard became four people per room, then it further reduced to three people per room, eventually came to double rooms, and at the end of the process there were even students who were given individual rooms.

That I had to be thankful about.

However, if I had to say whether an individual room was comfortable, that was not necessarily the case.

That was because there was a tendency to carry out surprise inspections, and it was truly impossibly to predict when the door would open and the building inspector would come in.

It also happened that an upperclassman or the dorm mother came in in the stead of the inspector.

There was a mountain of things they had to inspect in the surprise, and in practice I was interrupted continuously without even days in between inspections.

It was forbidden for students to protest this and lock their rooms.

Punishment was severe.

The punishment I most feared was being deprived of my individual room.

The people who had the right to do that were the supervisor, the dorm mother, the prefects... well, just about anyone in charge.

Naturally, life became one of enforced stress, and only in times when I was certain that I was following dormitory rules could I in a certain sense breathe easy.

The dormitory building (the dorm) followed different rules from the school itself.

The most powerful person was the teacher named Building Inspector.

She lived together with the students and had a great number of powers.

The building inspector was that very skinny teacher who had guided me around on the first day.

However, there were many jobs that the inspector was involved with, and it seemed that there were no few things to do in her work as a teacher, as well.

While she was absent, that duty was taken by chosen upperclassmen... prefects, who kept the order within the dormitory. It was customary for the prefects to be a chosen few from among the students with personalities that excelled both physically and mentally.

The powers held by prefects were tremendous.

For example, if a student were to commit an infraction when the inspector was not there, it was the duty of prefects to order them to clean the toilets as punishment.

They also had a heavy responsibility, if they slacked on that they might conversely be dismissed from that post.

Other things they had to do was roll call, supervising the cafeteria, advising students, deciding who was to be in charge...

It was a given that order within the dormitory would be kept by the prefects.

Now, when someone contravened dormitory rules, points were subtracted.

As points lowered it came to a punishment, and it was imaginable one of them would be deprivation of private room privileges.

Also, surprise investigations were carried out even during classes.

These were mainly inspections on items owned, they were carried out with thoroughness in order to discover prohibited items such as cigarettes and drugs or other types of toys.

No need to say it, I endeavored to live according to the rules.

I did so when at school, of course, but even in the dormitory I did not lower my guard.

And that was why the gloominess was unbearable.

A Place for Me

When I had nothing to do, I searched for a place for me.

Where I could unwind without attracting people's eyes, with good ventilation, neither cold nor hot, one that would put me in a good mood... I believed that a place like that had to exist somewhere.

It would of course not be easy to find, but I did not mind.

It was important that I had a destination when walking around.

And still, supposing I found this wonderful place, these hours of walking around would be then exchanged for hours where I would be unhurried and could relax on my own.

First thing, I began by walking about the dormitory building.

Tiny little dead-end crannies, unused rooms, attics, I put my expectations on things like those existing.

Sad to say that rooms like those either did not exist, and those that seemed hopeful were firmly locked, it was one or both.

Also, the ones that seemed hopeful, as far as I could glean from peeking in from the cracks, had dangerous items piled up to the roof inside, and it looked like it would be quite difficult to turn them into places of comfort.

I tried going to the rec room.

It had been offered by this facility as a place of relaxation for the boarding students. It was a fact that other students were there, and on that point it was somewhat distant from what I hoped.

It was just that, if the rec room were to be filled with stillness and silence and a lack of concern towards people, I thought it would be of some measure of use, perhaps.

The rec room was also the only place in the dormitory where heating was working to any extent.

I opened the rec room's hinged door and both the ruckus and the organ music stopped on the dot as a number of eyes beyond count shot all at once at me.

"..."

It appeared that many dozens of students were packed inside.

Male students were scuffling on top of a table.

A group was surrounding the organ.

A group was amusing themselves with cards in a corner.

Men and women having pleasant chats.

It looked like Curly Hair was also present.

Students were rubbing shoulder to shoulder and behaving as they pleased.

I did not enter the room, I closed the door and withdrew to the corridor. One breath later, the extreme bustle in the rec room resumed.

It appeared that there was no unexplored space within the dormitory.

What drew my eyes next were the various facilities within the grounds.

Unexpectedly, there were places that would work as hidden houses out in the fields.

The gazebo was not a bad choice, but as there was nothing that blocked it off from its surrounding environment, depending on the season I might freeze from the cold.

Although no one visited the tool shed, there was a nasty sour smell permeating the walls, and just stopping there for a while gave me a headache.

The depths of the woods did not draw people's eyes, but there were only locations unsuitable for a person to simply unwind.

I walked further away and discovered a place where the land raised up and came to a bit of a cliff. The cliff even had a small cave, and I managed to enter it by stooping over.

The inside of the cave was dry and much warmer than I thought, and there did not seem to be any scary bugs either. I thought it quite the excellent piece of estate, but that was perhaps because I had not seen anything good so far.

As the entrance was small and the ceiling was low, once I grew bigger I could no longer enter this cave.

But I even thought that in those several eternal years until then, I could spend a relaxed time

in here.

When I advanced further in its depths, I found animal bones scattered around.

It appeared to be a disposal place for cadavers, where the bodies of livestock were tossed inside.

I left the cave in silence and stepped on the path back to the dormitory.

Cricket

The cricket matches were most often held on Saturday afternoons.

It had been decided that all the students had to participate to this traditional sport at The School.

Participation to a team was discretionary, and it was necessary to eventually be affiliated with one to participate to the contest, but I remained unaffiliated.

That was why cricket was, to me, the act of practicing bowling in silence all alone in the gym, which was for these occasions reused as contest field.

It was a boring sport.

No matter how much I practiced, I could not get the ball to go straight.

The cast ball followed the slopes beneath the floor and once again came back to me.

I recovered the ball from the device installed in the standby zone and repeated my cricketing.

As the device was partially damaged, it could not set out pins to catch my roll.

I could only point towards a empty hole and toss the ball.

And even that I could never control right.

I could not even be expected to have fun like this.

Incessant cheers made the rounds of the playground.

It seemed that team opposition was really heating things up. On the opposite zone, the frontline upperclassmen athletes were exchanging cheers of encouragement with their teammates and cricketing the balls in turns.

It was none of my business.

The supervising teacher walked towards me.

"Are you still without a team?"

I straightened my back and answered like an honor student.

"Yes, sensei. I am still not very skilled, and so as to not be a burden to a team, I would like just a little bit more practice time."

The teacher made just a slightly worried face.

"...have you received an invitation from someone yet?"

"Yes. I have spoken with a few of them."

"There is no more appropriate teacher for competitiveness in a sport than teammates. If you just want to practice, then go beg someone to teach you."

Replacing the teacher who left, Curly Hair approached.

"Excuse me, but I believe you should be casting the ball by sliding it from below..."

"..."

"You just looked like you were in trouble... I'm sorry for interfering."

Saying just that, Curly Hair went back.

Once I tried cricketing the ball as she said, it advanced straight and was sucked in by the strike zone.

"...I see."

I left the practice area, searched for Curly Hair, and approached her.

"You should just leave 'er alone." "But..." "She's just hiding off by herself, there's no need to worry about 'er."

I turned around and left that place behind.

Exams

Exams occurred four times a year.

And in short, if one excelled, it was possible to advance grades partway through the year.

That was the major reason why I was focused on studying.

The more I went up in grades, the more variety of ages there would be in a single class, I believed. I wanted to waste not a single day in gaining a place in which I would not stand out.

I wanted to live life as an individual grain of sand in a class with no uniformity.

That could become true, but it depended on my efforts.

I also dedicated myself more and more to learning.

This was the first exam, on the second month since I had enrolled. It seemed that I was the first in grades received in the class, Curly Hair excluded.

For now, the answer sheet that came back had an evaluation I could be satisfied with, and if I kept going like this it ought be conceded as certain that I should advance grades.

"Excuse me, congratulations!"

"What?"

Curly Hair was standing next to my desk.

"I hear you got top grades for this test, miss."

"..."

A clear voice resounded around the classroom.

I thought it a chilly statement. I did not believe the response from the classroom would be favorable. Despite that, Curly Hair alone did not notice that.

"Top grades." "What else, she's older." "Studying that hard made it an easy victory."

Inexplicably I could hear those malicious words very well.

But was Curly Hair not also hearing them?

"You really studied hard. You got some good results!"

The way she spoke like she was any of her business was truly innocent, and it was easy to understand that it came from her liking me from the bottom of her heart. However, I really had no words of gratitude to return to her.

On the next day, my bad presentment came to be accurate in a certain sense.

During break time, dirty water got splashed on the textbook I had taken my eyes off of briefly. It was dirtied with care, to ensure that it would stain well.

I felt that whatever this group of people of the same age kept within themselves all along had finally bared its fangs.

How nice would it be if I could scream right out, rush out of the classroom, and go somewhere else.

Reason just barely won out, and I tossed the textbook back into my bag.

The teacher came and called me out during class.

"Miss Top Grades, read out page two hundred fourteen from the book."

"Sensei, I have lost my textbook."

"Then have somebody show you."

Curly Hair moved from her seat and sat down on the seat next to me, which was unoccupied.

"Here."

"..."

The moment I was about to read out the textbook I had received, a wholly unintentional groan that I could not repress of my strength escaped from the depths of my throat.

Friend (temp)

"...so that happened. I think it's terrible, you know?"

I spoke to my friend (temp).

The friend (temp) kept silent as he listened to my complaints.

"She's hiding her real intentions, there's no mistake. That's how I see it."

The friend (temp) moved his hands smoothly, continuing his own job without mistakes.

"If you can advance grades, I believe you will be able to say goodbye to this sort of concerns."

Thump, and the friend (temp) hit his head against the wall.

Maybe it was a habit, maybe he was damaged, I could not tell.

I grabbed his head with both hands, forcibly changed his direction, and he obediently went straight down the corridor.

"I am RYOBO 203r. A cultural assistance machine that supports the life of people. You can choose colors from pearl white, light blue, and mint green. I am RYOBO 203r. A cultural assistance machine—"

My friend (temp) made the cleaning disc installed on the wall revolve as he shouted out loud towards the corridor with no one in it.

Library

There was a library in the main building.

As a proposed site for the Place Just For Me it was, at present, the one with the most promise.

When Wintertime came the cold air made me shiver to the core of my bones, but anywhere in the dormitory my exhaled breath turned white anyway. As long as I could bathe in the sunlight near the window, this place was still better.

Most importantly, children did not come to the library.

When they needed to check out classics from classes the place did temporarily become noisy, but normally it was truly quiet.

Only stiff and formal books existed here.

We had history books, specialized texts, academic books... there was not one book that the barbaric students here would like.

Inexplicably, even these formal books seemed to be subject to stealing, as there was a piece of paper that said that stealing books would be met with severe punishment.

Once I started going to the library, the volume of things I read increased.

Once searched, I found deeply interesting topics even in books I thought boring.

What particularly drew my interest were the depictions concerning the fairies.

Fairies—

I was surprisingly ignorant about them.

Far in the past, humanity had relinquished the crown of apex creatures and Earth was now the domain of them, the fairies... as far as that, everybody knew.

However, in practice, there existed nearly no literature that could be called so regarding their societies, their culture, their origins.

Humanity had experienced large-scale information loss many times in their history. The majority of stored records had been lost, and many cultures, knowledges, and skills became fragmentary.

Though there were lands in which science survived, there were also places where the standard of living had utterly returned to what it was before the Industrial Revolution. Here at The School, all that was left of that was that dorm mother robot, you see. There were also people who had never personally seen a fairy.

Though the majority of humans knew mentally that they were the apex creatures, they likely could not feel that fact as reality.

The figures of the fairies were hazy in my memories.

When I was much younger than now, in an era when the world and I were not as distinct, I was sure that I played around with them.

When oh when did mankind leave everything to them, I wondered.

Just what exactly were the fairies?

At some point, my reading became dominated by following up on human history and the descriptions concerning fairies.

And then, one day, there was this specialized book that I just casually happened to open. In it there was an old piece of paper folded in fours.

Well, I thought it a blank piece of paper, but I could see faint lines in transparency. It seemed that a diagram was drawn on it.

With the spine peeled off I could not conclude what the name of the book was. I checked the classification on the shelf. Index six-nine-something. The tag was missing, so I could not tell if it was six-nine-one or six-nine-nine. What shelf were the index six-whatever in the new national Dewey system?

"That there's architecture."

"Eek!"

A sudden attack. I was so startled I nearly jumped.

"Isolation is the friend of concentration, but in your case, your concentration is worthy of special mention."

On the spot, I hid the paper in my pocket.

"M-, mister principal?"

"Ho-hoh, looks like I startled you. Sorry. You were muttering something to yourself, and I just happened to hear it."

"No, really..."

"Whopsie-daisy."

And the principal sat down on the seat right opposite me.

"Looks like you've been zealously reading books these days, so could I ask you to tell me in what field your research is headed?"

"I am not, truly, that is exaggerating things."

The principal was quite strict in his classes, but now he made a warm smile like he was a different person.

"No need to be tense. It's not like I'm going to score you."

"It... is about fairies."

"That's some hard subject you're tackling. Very good, very good."

"Is it a difficult subject?"

"Yeah. That's a field that's hard to get a grip on..." The principal tapped his fingertip on his temple. "Oooh, right, right. Is your grandfather doing well, I wonder?"

"Yes, he is well, but... you know about my Grandfather?"

"In the past we were often together. He was a really worthy person with the skills to take action. Seems many things happened, but it's a relief that he managed to take charge of his granddaughter. You have excellent scores and more than enough appetite for learning. However, your relationships seem to be suffering."

I was at a loss for words.

"Well, things like that do happen when you're young. Back when I was a child, my human relationships were also a little bit hectic. As long as it's nothing extreme, it'll build you strength."

"I am quite all right. I will manage this by my own strength."

The principal smiled.

"Changing subjects, do you know about the personal teacher tutoring system? If you at least skimmed our school's regulations you should know that we have that."

"I do, mister principal."

People who wished to learn more advanced knowledge, should their qualifications to the matter be acknowledged, were able to nominate a teacher and receive guidance. That was the system it was.

"You could also nominate the principal for that, strangely people don't seem to know that."

"What..."

"My specialization is humanities as a whole, see, that includes the field of New Humanities. New Humanities is the field that concerns fairies. Well, only if you're interested."

After the principal had left, I tried spreading out the scrap of paper.

It was an old, rough sketch of the dormitory.

However, the layout seemed to be quite different from the one I knew.

Advancing Grades

Once the results of the second exam came, the final decision was made that I would be advancing grades.

I became a second grade student in a form similar to a scheduled skipping of grades.

The majority of first grade students remained in the same grade for two to three years.

And so I managed to complete that curriculum in half a year, well done indeed.

"Excuse me, miss..."

The sound of a knock came and the door opened by itself.

Standing there was Curly Hair.

"I was so surprised that you went up a grade. Unbelievably that you would go up so fast... I was truly, and I mean truly surprised..."

Curly Hair was in nightclothes and she was holding a plushie at her breast.

"After all, miss, I thought that time would definitely fix all kinds of things. All kind of things. The thing between you, miss, and all of us, for example, that kind of things. But with a thing like this happening, it makes me feel that all of that has now been left behind. And that's really sad, you know?"

"Is it, now."

I declared that coldly.

I more or less managed to guess that she was always hiding her real intentions.



"I know what you are thinking. That the outsider I was is gone. That the eyesore is gone. That you can all sigh a breath of relief now. That from now on it will go back to being as it always was, those things."

"That... is nothing like what I'm thinking..."

"First of all, I believe it better that what lays between you people and me remains unsolved."

"But why?"

I believed that my face was making a cynical smile.

"Solving a thing like that would require all sort of things coming to light. For example, the first thing required to solve things would be for someone to confess. The perpetrator would have to confess everything. And sometimes, that would pull up quite the problematic things, you know? For example, it would have to clarify who was actually behind everything."

"Behind everything?"

"For example, that there existed a queen that ordered the bullying from the shadows."

"..."

"Were you playing some game? Whether you were able to do as told and pretend to be sympathetic to a new and older student, for example, and I must say that that does really sound fascinating, though. I am not sure I would want to be on the receiving end of that, I suppose, those are my honest feelings."

Curly Hair had no words, she just stood there dazed.

"But I am sorry to say that it appears time has run out, you see? Now then, with that, farewell."

I did not want to see any more fooling around, so I closed the door with that.

It was just time for roll call to begin.

On the other side of the door she kept telling what sounded like excuses, but eventually RYOBO discovered her and she was dragged away.

After that, we never had a proper talk again.

And that was why I had no means of making sure whether what I had stated was correct or mistaken.

Whichever it was, I did not care.

Mount Olympus

The hill with a nice view that stood behind the main building was called Mount Olympus.

The ruins of an ancient city were clearly visible, dividing the land into something like a maze, making it quite the mysterious place.

In the past, there was an era in which only those in the highest grade were allowed to climb it... or so I had heard.

This was an age where the students decreased years after year, and boys in particular had long had difficulties learning. There were difficulties of all kinds that a young one had to go through.

Though The School was originally a boy's school, the number of boys did nothing but decrease year after year.

There were no more upperclassmen with strength to inherit the vigor of legends, in their stead there were lowerclassmen from first to third grade who, at this point, were acting as thugs inside the school, with faces that said that they believed the whole thing was their property.

It appeared that, besides the gathering spot at the clock tower, they also came to this hill.

I found smoked cigarette stubs scattered at my feet, and decided that I would just stop

coming here.

As I was about to descend the hill, I spotted, there at the feet of the hill, the tiny gang climbing up right at that moment.

I hid myself past some ruins.

"Oi, he ran away over there!" "Let's grab 'im!" "Guys who run away get the death penalty!"

"Hurry up, surround 'im, get ahead of 'im!" "Let's chase 'im to somewhere high up!"

The gang of brats seemed to be elated as they rushed up the hill.

It appeared they were chasing someone.

I did not commit the foolishness of jutting my head out to see and kept still, breathing slowly.

As the gang approached I looked for a good moment to run away.

"Over there, he ran over there!" "He's hiding!" "Surround 'im!"

Being careful not to be discovered, I moved following the ruins.

The children kept constantly shouting wildly, their breathing wild, so it was easy to guess when they were coming close.

Just when I thought I had somehow managed to escape successfully, a tiny figure jumped out before my eyes.

"Plll!"

"..."

The figure's stature was no more than around two fists high.

"...a fairy?"

"Looks like this is the end..."

The fairy was frozen in terror. He shivered and remained sitting on his behind, not trying to escape.

Ahhh, that is right.

Fairies were creatures like that, I believed.

I had played with them when I was young—

That fact, which had faded from my memories to an inexplicable extent, made me puzzled.

"This way, guys! Everybody come!" "Catch 'im and dissect 'im!" "It's a fairy autopsy!" "The weak get bullied! The weak get bullied! The weak get bullied!"

The voices of the chasers startled me back.

Their words left an unpleasant echo behind as they passed through my ears.

I up and grabbed the fairy, jammed him in my pocket, and set out to start running.

Before I did, I threw sharp pebbles in a random direction. The grass made a rustling noise.

"Found 'im! He's over there!"

As the children drew close, I ran down the hill.

Inside the pocket I was carefully holding down with a hand, a tiny warmth rounded up.

Fairy

"You saved me, thanksies!"

I did not know what to do with the fairy I had saved.

That was because I did not know how to speak to the creature crawling about on top of my desk.

We were both humanity, we were equal beings. Despite that, talking to a fairy held the same embarrassment of talking to a plush toy.

"Do you live on the hill?"

"Is that a hill?"

"Why were you there?"

"Who knows?"

"Do you live alone?"

"I'm always spacing out."

He was a mysterious creature.

"Then are you alone? Do you have friends?"

"I don't have friends. One day I just realized that I was alone."

"Being all alone must be lonely."

"But it's super fun!"

"Fun? Really? Being alone?"

Suddenly, a shadow came on the fairy's simplified features.

"...it... isn't... fun...?"

"T-, there is no need to think so deeply about it!"

It seems he wanted to convince himself that it was fun.

"Then, a different question. What do you do about food?"

"I don't eat."

"Huh? You do not eat?"

"We last long even without eating."

"Yes, but... if you do not eat at all, then..."

"Now that you say it... there's something... something...?"

The fairy held his belly with both hands.

"There's something that I don't have enough of inside the belly?"

"I do not know, but... that means you are hungry, right?"

Nothing as convenient as night snacks existed in the dormitory.

I only occasionally wrapped up the leftovers from lunch and used them in the stead of a night snack.

I opened that package and offered it to the fairy.

"Here."

"What's this?"

The fairy tilted his head.

"You can eat this. I do not want it."

"But it's all white and square...?"

"This is called a sandwich. It is a food. It is tasty."

The fairy shook his head.

"This is too white."

"I do not know what that means, however."

"It's hard to accept something so square."

"...you should just try eating it a little bit. This is nothing odd."

"I don't want it."

The fairy pushed the sandwich back at me.

"What needs to be returned gets returned! People's things get returned to the people!"

"You know odd sayings, I see."

"Even if I ate this, I won't become happy at all."

"Happy, huh... ah, right. How about this?"

I presented a wrapped lump of sugar to the fairy.

This was something I put in the coffee that comes with breakfast.

"Oooh..."

The fairy's eyes glittered.

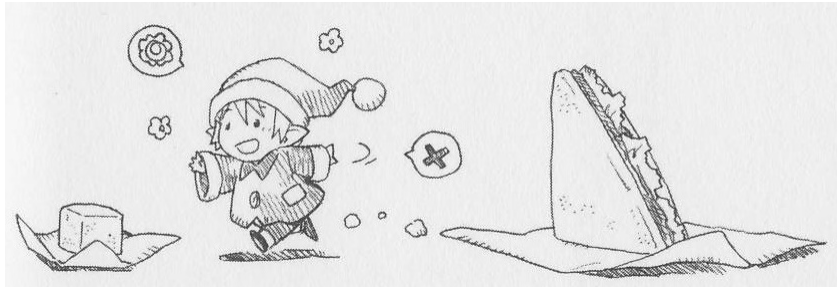
"This white and square thing is just what I was waiting for!"

"But you just rejected something for the same reason..."

"This... this... can I nibble it? Can I nibble it?"

"You can nibble it."

The fairy nibbled the lump of sugar.



He ate it away in the blink of an eye, then hopped up and screamed this.

"Happiness is white powder!"

"That statement will invite misunderstandings..."

"It's the taste of happiness?"

"In other words, you eat sweet things? The nectar of flowers, for example?"

"Nectar so deliish!"

"And also sweets?"

"Sweets?"

"They are sweet foods, there are many types... when you eat them you feel like you are having fun... but at present we do not have them often. That is because they are not made anywhere."

I did manage to get some from an old lady in the neighborhood who was skilled at cooking whenever she made too many.

If I queued up at the caravan, I expected I would be able to get some rationed ones.

But in the present era, sweets were something rare to taste.

I should just make them on my own, but it would require gathering ingredients which would be about equally laborious.

"...so that happened," and the fairy was dejected. "Is life only for that purpose?"

"Please stop it with that behavior."

I could do nothing but think about what to do from here on out.

"And so, what do you want to do?"

"I wanna vanish."

"Come now..."

I lost my presence of mind.

The fairy continued with words.

"Soon, the time for me to disappear will come!" "Do we disappear when we think of disappearing?" "Vanishing, disappearing, it's goodbye!"

"...vanishing, does that mean dying?"

"I don't get what dying is."

"Then are you going to vanish because you are lonely?"

"Somehow."

When I had just arrived at The School, I was also targeted by troublesome pranks. Back then, it felt that if I wished to disappear, then I would really disappear.

"If there was lots of white powder... or maybe..."

"...let us stop calling it 'white powder', please. It is sugar."

"Is there any?"

"No, it is rare to come upon it..."

"Isn't it!"

"Well, not being dissected is still a good result, I believe."

"If that had to happen, it would have happened!"

"...that is no excuse."

I poked the fairy's head with my fingertip.

"aWhn!"

From then on, I let the fairy live in my room.

Search

To repeat, my dormitory room was not safe.

Although a private room, it was unknown when an inspection would come.

Discovering a place for me to be alone in could at present be said to be urgent.

The dormitory, the main building, the fields, having gone around to look at all of those I once again looped back and searched the interior of the dorm.

With the rough sketch I had discovered in the library back then in hand, I measured distance in strides as I repeatedly went back and forth through the corridors.

If looked at from aside, it would be the exact behavior of a weirdo.

But even something like that, at this point, was nothing I could get worried about.

There were still hazings and they were hard to bear, but the pain of being talked about behind my back was starting to no longer eat away at my heart.

"If someone comes, make sure to hide."

"Ayeeee!"

The fairy came with me. What I was searching for was a proper home for him.

He snugly fit into the pocket I had around my waist, and as long as he did not move, he was exactly like a tiny doll.

But as it happened, every time the fairy saw something new he made a ruckus with an *"amazing!"* or a *"fantastic!"*

A witness mistaking him for a doll was a faint hope.

"...so, with this we are at one hundred twenty-eight steps. As I thought, this differs from the map..."

When beginning this, I measured my walking distance. I measured length step by step, coming to an average figure for one hundred steps. Though not as I would had I a ruler, I could measure distances fairly accurately with my walking.

The dormitory in the rough sketch and the one in reality differed in the lengths of corridors and number of rooms.

Now just what could all this mean, I asked to all my knowledge.

A gentleman with a good physique came walking in from the corridor.

I pushed the fairy into my pocket.

"Hello, you."

"Good morning, mister principal."

It was etiquette to go near the wall, stand up straight, and give the right of way to older people.

The principal came to a stop.

"You're always alone, doesn't that hurt?"

"No, mister principal. I have come here to learn."

"That's an acceptable answer, but it's not everything. Still, fulfilling your curiosity by walking around is a necessary requirement for a good scholar. You should do as you want for now. After all, growing up in the heart takes time. It's much faster for the head to get good. By the way."

"Yes?"

"Why're you keeping your fingers inside your pocket?"

Right after I politely saw off the principal, the fairy jumped out.

"Old fart?"

"Hey, that is not a nice thing to say!"

"You know everyone calls him that?"

"I do not say that. What if we increased our enemies further, what would we do then!"

"So that's what was gonna happen!"

It was the first time since enrolling that I had had this many pointless conversations.

"More importantly, this corridor here. I just feel it much more oppressive compared to the others. It is actually tighter by half a step, and shorter by three steps."

It was just like its surface area had been whittled away...

Despite that, the spacing of the rooms was the same.

"Or maybe I failed to find a nook... or something?"

"And there he comes."

"Ah... he is here."

As I was sinking into thought, sitting on the floor, RYOBO approached.

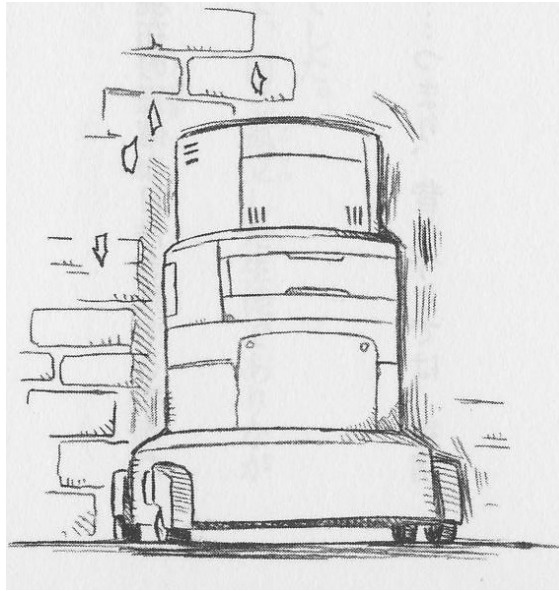
"This is a violation of dorm rules."

"No, you are mistaken, I have permission from the principal."

The robot spun all the way around and,

"...please endeavor to live a life in sound health and with respect of the rules. I am RYOBO 203r. A cultural assistance machine that supports—"

He bumped into a wall.



"Pearl white!"

An error had occurred in his voice messages.

"And mint green!"

"Again..."

I put my hand on him to try to move him back, and that was when I noticed something.

"Could it be that this robot..."

"Keen insight, that?"

Keen insight. He meant that I have sharp eyes. But that is irrelevant.

"Look at this."

"Light bluuue..."

Even if his voice had bugged out, his functionalities were not damaged.

The robot skimmed the map I held aloft.

"Unable to read. It does not appear to be formatted as appropriate data."

"No good, then..."

I changed the question.

"Say, around when were you activated?"

"It has been one thousand one hundred sixty-five days since reactivation. To receive a more accurate answer, please input the accurate present date."

"No, you may go. Thank you, dorm mother."

As the robot went away, the fairy showed his face.

"What was that?"

"I wonder, could that robot be referencing an older map... meaning, in other words, that the layout of the dormitory has been altered from the past till now."

One thousand one hundred sixty-five days was not that far back.

Because he had been reactivated, the data went back to how it was when he was shipped. As the present building had been remodeled it differed from the one in the past, causing errors to occur in the robot.

"This map... I wonder why it was in the library."

It was part of the expansion plans, there was no mistake.

Information for the workers. It was in the architecture shelf. As they were researching, the

expansion... but what if it was not for workers? Among the higher functioning construction materials there were some that could move / change according to a program. Even a beginner could carry out a building expansion. In the parts where building materials had been lost... they used wood and—

A variety of thoughts flowed into a single line inside my head.

Awww, if only these were my skills in poetry compositions I would not need to have so many difficulties with poem writing class, seriously.

Just a little more and a brilliant idea might come to me.

"Broomhead, good morning."

"Ngh..."

Displeasure, irritation, contrarianism, a sense of inferiority:

my thoughts switched over to those in an instant.

To put in other words, it was the feeling that I did not want to deal with her.

Though I did not remember Curly Hair's name, hers... I could never forget about Y.

"Now what are you doing, racking your nonexistent brains."

Peeking at the map in my hands, Y made a thin smile.

"...this is none of your business."

Y was the same age as I.

She was an excellent student, and up till now she had skipped grades twice, being at present a fourth grader.

Despite having a physique built like a twig, her behavior was overwhelming, and though we were both solitary students, she was feared, while I was made light of.

The first day I enrolled, many students witnessed me sitting in the corridor, and that was one aspect that led to my present evaluation.

She had set that up intentionally, so it was difficult to feel anything except the desire not to deal with this.

Her shoulder bumped fairly hard into me.

"Ow..."

"Excuse me."

She giggled as she walked away.

The fairy said this.

"That just looked like a nice human being, huh?"

He had no eyes with which to see.

Obstruction

It happened that day at dinnertime.

The gang had taken the trays with plates still on them and ran through the passage.

There were teachers were present there, and still the rules were loosened during cleanup time, and many things were disregarded.

They would never miss out the exact specific time during which they could run wild.

When they ran around in the narrow areas between the dining tables it happened that their knees and shoulders hit people's backs, making them feel pain. Though underclassmen, the gang was a group, and fearing that things could get problematic if they did, no one complained.

I also had things I had to do, so I did not concern myself with that.

However—

One of the gang made a spectacular tumble right behind my back. There were still dishes on the tray he had in hand.

And on them, there was still a large portion of stew remaining.

"...!"

The map I had opened in my lap became smeared with stew.

On the spot, I stood up and wiped the map on the floor.

"Broomhead tripped me up!"

"...I did nothing of the sort."

If I snapped in my reply, the gang would find it fun and jeer me.

Therefore, I stated that as coldly as possible.

"And besides, it was you who tripped into me."

I vigorously thrust at his shoulder.

The gang member's complexion changed suddenly.

I was not only much older, I was also much taller.

"Ohhh so scawy. Now that you're big only in height, you really look like a broom! Sweep the floor, you broom thing!"

The boy ran away.

I had to clean the floor despite it being wholly not my responsibility.

I believed it the minimum possible damage to incur.

"What happened?"

The building inspector came and asked me that.

"Ah, yes, sensei. Some stew has been spilled."

"And was it you?"

"...yes."

"Well, clean up after yourself."

As told, I cleaned up the dirty floor.

The map was stained with stew, and it did not seem readable anymore.

Feeling a gaze I turned back to see that Y was just right then looking at me and smiling.

Sneering.

My unwillingness to deal with her emitted a scorching smell.

"Miss, are you all right?"

Curly Hair rushed over.

"I will help you."

"...no thank you."

"But this was all the fault of that unruly boy."

"It is not necessarily so. Someone else may have pulled that trigger."

Curly Hair bit her lips.

"...I am not some mastermind."

"I have no way of making sure of that."

"I did not do it!"

The cafeteria, filled with the bustle of cleanup, turned audibly silent.

"I'm just talking to someone I want to talk to!"

I could not really respond to those strong emotions suddenly bashed into me.

Y was smiling like she was enjoying this.

"Why are you closing your heart so much...?"

It could even be hypothesized that this was a chance to improve the situation, perhaps.

Depending on how I acted now, everything later could change...

But I at present did not have the strength of heart to choose the right answer.
I had no allies.
I did not want to be friends with someone who laughed at others.
I did not mind being alone.
"Why do I close my heart, you ask?"
Those stubborn feelings were as if whispering to me to choose the words that she would hate the most.
"Because I have no people I want to be close to. That includes you."
As I whispered that at ear, she began trembling.
And with this, she would become an enemy:
with a feeling that I had gone and done it, in a certain sense, I also accepted that premonition.
I did also feel masochistic.
Well, since I did not have any allies anyway...
I thought a harsh blowback would be coming. But Curly Hair spun around, gave me her back, and left the cafeteria.
Was I mistaken?
"What a disgusting woman."
Y's heckling and the voice of my heart overlapped as if precisely identical.

The Secret Messy Room

Night.
I jumped down from my bed and rushed out in the corridor.
"Haah, haah."
I ran with ragged breath in the darkness.
I became completely exhausted, I had ran so much that I could neither struggle nor shout out.
An unknown emotion had suddenly assailed me.
It was the first time I had experienced it.
No means to deal with it existed within my knowledge.
The best plan was to hold my breath and wait for it to pass.
Despite that, I could not bear staying still.
I wanted to move.
Lights out time had long since past.
The corridors without traces of people or illumination were filled with a creepiness like I had strayed into the parallel world of the night.
The way the corridor creaked and squeaked I heard as the laughter of a monster.
I bumped into walls and went up and down stairs many times.
I no longer even knew where I was running to.
If I shouted out, someone might hear and come out.
It could also happen that the dormant robot would act, of course.
I was in a panic. I could not even speak out.
Next thing I noticed I was on the verge of losing consciousness, sitting down inside the darkness.
After I had acted as instinct told me, there was a listless regret.
The feelings had sedimented compared to before raging out, and smeared the bottom of my heart.
"...no."

My feelings overflowed like I was throwing them up.

It had surged up and out from my stomach.

"...no.. no..."

I clung to a bookshelf that was there and tipped it over.

Books scattered on the floor.

It was dark and I could not tell their titles.

So this was going to be the library, then. Since there were no other places where books were overflowing in amounts this massive, it had to be so. I had strayed into the library. Except the library was in the main building. And so, this being the dormitory, no matter how much or how far I ran, I would never reach the library.

...it was irrelevant.

"NO!"

After that I punched the wall, tossed furniture, threw away books... all depending on what I had nearby.

At some point I was sitting down and crying.

I could not even understand what exactly I was angry about. But as I was crying out, it became words and spilled out from my lips.

"School, really, it is not fun at all..."

Truth was,

it was lonely to be on my own.

Truth was,

I wanted to get along with some friends.

Truth was,

being derided and made fun of was so painful I felt like dying.

...there was no possibility that this would not hurt me.

Being sneered at and being bullied and being the target of the crowd's rumors, they were all events so sickening that they made me want to spill the contents of my stomach.

I could harden my heart solidly and bear it somehow. But at times like those, I could not bear to hate hands extended so visibly they could not be ignored.

What if I were to grasp them, and they turned out to be the omens of betrayal?

I believed that I would most certainly shatter.

"I want to be strong..."

If there was a single class I would want to take at The School, then that was what I wanted to learn.

Because if I could bear whatever circumstance, then I could always remain alone.

No, even those thoughts were only a trap door that covered my real feelings.

My real desire. That was—

"I do not... want to be... alone."

Awww, I went and put it into words. I had spoken it out.

But once I did that, all my bravado rotted out.

My mind suddenly went far away.

That may have been the sound of my very own self as it shattered.

A tiny, colorful thing then stood before me.

"That's a simple wish?"

It was that fairy.

"What?"

"Friends!"

"Eh? What? Eh? Eh? Eh?"

My memories interrupted there for a moment.

I was standing in the corridor.

I had the feeling that I had closed the door behind me, but there was just a wall there, there was no such thing as a secret room.

Did I have a dream or something?

However, in one hand I was holding a book which I had seemingly grabbed without noticing. Its name was, *The Heart of Thomas in the Sky*.

It seemed to be a fairly ancient foreign novel.

It was pocket paperback sized, and had a colorful illustration on its cover.

I tried flipping through it and, while there was darkness made it impossible for me to follow the text, it put me in a mood I could not quite say and that I could not explain well.

"What could it be... for some reason, when I read this... my heart... it feels all unsteady..."

I put the paperback in my pocket and stretched.

I thought there had been something in that pocket.

However, I could not remember.

I had lost it, indeed I had. However, there was no sense of loss.

Rather, it felt like I had gained many things.

What had tormented me felt tiny and silly.

I wanted to become an unfair adult. I wanted to become a shameless adult. An adult who said all that she wanted to say, too.

At that moment, I felt like I could.

Skiping Grades

Advancing grades exactly once per half year, and I too became third grader.

There were still many classmates who were younger, however around here there were people stalled for advancement, so there were several in this grade who were my same age.

I thought it would certainly be difficult to advance grades with the very next test, but I expected that it would not be difficult to rise to fourth grader with the test following that.

I dedicated myself to studying.

There were difficult parts in the new curriculum, but meticulous studying dissolved them.

And then, half a year later, we came to the test.

Although I received acceptable grades, I was confronted with just one situation I had not foreseen.

"...that is my name. I have had experience in being in charge during my second year. I would be happy if you all could teach me all sorts of things. I will be in your care."

Curly Hair had advanced grades.

The third grade classroom was a class scarce in spirit of unity.

The cheerful (at times terribly malicious) solidarity that the first and second graders had was completely nonexistent.

The cause of that was in the classwork.

Advancing grades at The School was not determined only by age.

The third graders made up the majority of people who had advanced normally, as well as those who had been stalled for progress for the longest time.

Grade advancement stress, that was what it may have been called.

The strict rules for advancement could not avoid putting the students on edge. A tidal wave that was somewhat harsh to be struck by came even for the better students who had skipped grades. And that hit even harder the third grade students with single-digit ages who had risen up at the earliest possible age, more than those like me who had come in later due to age. Curly Hair was both. Her cheerful demeanor, so appropriate for her age, would not move her in a good direction, either. Because the fact that she had skipped grades despite being younger will be put in even more relief. It was a harsh world's thing that, now and then, the better students overtook even the students who were older, but had inferior grades, and went on to become upperclassmen. On that point, I had done well. Because I acted so as to not draw attention. But she had made a mistake. At this point, there were no students in the classroom that would converse with Curly Hair. So what was she going to do then. Those golden hair shining so much dulled, her eyes that always and only looked towards the sun would come to point to nowhere else but the floor, those lips that altered their shape in dizzying ways were drawn into a single line... it was the perfect figure of a lonely person. The vividness of a little girl faded, that glorious smile she had when she was at the center of everybody was lost, and she became a completely dejected woman. I see, a human's personality reeeally changed depending on the environment, she made me think, it was a gruesome event that made it impossible to doubt the meaning of the existence of will and soul. I was also solitary, but I had both the resolve and the experience to withstand that. I was also able to converse with anyone, should that turn out to be necessary. I stood superior. I found her circumstances to be just a little pitiable, however I had no intention of extending a hand to her just because of that. I knew well myself the hardships and the miserable feelings that would provoke. ...I decided that, as long as nothing serious happened, I would ignore her. Something serious. For example her getting her skirt stolen and having to sit in the afternoon classroom alone in her underwear would be by any definition 'something serious', indeed. I could not understand. And so I tossed with as much violence as I could manage a dirty kilt skirt on Curly Hair's desk. The girl suddenly lifted her head. "Uhm... is this... my skirt?" "Do not be concerned. This is not out of pity." "This... where did you?" "The garbage abandoned inside the dormitory gets collected by the robot." RYOBO had failed to suck up a large piece of garbage, which caused an error and brought him to a standstill. "That robot has his years, you must give him some pity, you know? It looked like it was tossed in front of the bathroom, so I am sure it was dirtied. Do please wash it yourself, all right." I wanted to say only that and go our separate ways immediately.

Before Curly Hair went *I don't need your pity GRRR!*

But, see, as it happened...

"Will you... will you please..."

"Excuse me?"

"Will you please become my big sister!"

"HyEEh!"

She clung to my waist.

"If that's impossible then I'm fine with you being my mother!"

"What are you talking about, let me go!"

Curly Hair kept her face stuck into my very own belly as she mumbled this.

"In this corrupt world with no one to rely on the only person that I can confide in is you, my reliable onee-san..."

That was scary and incomprehensible on top of that.

But I was embraced firmly and she was not about to let me go. She was like a spoiled child.

With nothing else to be done I thumped her with my fist, but still she would not let me go.

"Let me go. I told you that this was not out of pity."

"It's all good... because you treated me nicely at least once..."

It appeared that this girl did not have a sensitive heart like mine.

Well then, if that is so, that would only last until I changed attitude.

"Fine, it was in fact pity. I looked at you from above and sympathized with your being a loser, that is why I helped you."

"Eh...?"

"How about that? It should make you angry."

"You pitied me! I am so happy!"

"Hyyh?!"

She pincered me and was not about to let me go.

Was she a crab, this girl?

I did think that she had something strange to her, but it seemed she was unimaginably in the reserve army of weirdoes.

As I scuttled back to the dormitory, I found that Curly Hair had forestalled me and was waiting for me with somewhat scary eyes.

"You're so late, onee-san, were you meeting with someone~?"

"Why... am I being questioned? Or rather, this is my room, why are you here?"

She showed me a bashful act.

"I will be your roommate starting today..."

"What is that, what does that mean?"

"My request... was accepted..."

"I believe that the request document requires my signature?"

"I faked your handwriting..."

This girl's dangerous. That was my hunch.

"Will you go away?"

"Why... would I?"

"Because you are scaring me."

"Bweeeh..."

"You are little weird."

"But I already carried in my bags."

There were mountains of her personal belongings stuffed into the room.

"The way you did this was like a premeditated crime."

"Uhm, could we swap bedsheets?"

"Why?!"

"There's no particular reason."

And as she was saying that, why if she did not have my very own bedsheets held at her breast.

"Give them back!"

"Then let's trade pillows."

"We will not. Leave."

"I like it though~."

She was not listening.

"What are these? Sweets?"

She pointed at a large plate that I had left in the room. Her eyes were moist with curiosity.

She would make this sort of nice face and snuggle up as much as she pleased. That was her type.

"...if you see those as anything but ingredients for a cake, please tell me."

"Cake? You are baking a cake? Amazing, you can bake by yourself!"

"I saw how to do it in a book so I have been trying things out."

I could not use fire until permission for it came. There was a period of waiting for my turn, too. There was a shared storehouse in the kitchen, but as I thought of using it I realized it was an environment subject to bullying, something I had to be vigilant about.

And so preparing just the ingredients, finishing preliminary preparation, and letting them sleep in my own room was a much cleverer way of doing it.

"What kind of cake are you baking?"

"A normal plum cake or a sponge cake, or a madeira cake."

"Ahhh, I see. Onee-san, I can smell the scent of vanilla essence."

"Do I need to wallop you?"

"And still... why so many ingredients?"

And it came. I readied myself.

She could not know about that.

"...I was thinking that maybe I should become a little more sociable."

"Is that really so?"

"I suppose so."

"Then, will you participate to our tea party next time? I joined a tea party circle called Wild Rose Society! It's really fun!"

"Sorry I hate people."

"Eh?"

"Sorry. That day I am not going to feel well."

"...are you deciding it now?"

No good. I could not escape.

"...do please allow me to participate."

"Ahhh, I'm sure it'll be fun!"

Humans were thinking grapes, I thought. They always came one after another like in grapevine.

For now, I could only do like a reed, avoid going against the blowing wind, and flexibly leave my body to it. A tea party for ladies. Conversations that bloomed like flowers, whispers of love that danced and fluttered, an exaggerated surprise towards any and all things:

I thought it would make me feel sorry for myself. Still, there seemed to be nothing to do but steady my resolve about it.

By the way,
what was this thing that she had to not know about?

Senpais

The Wild Rose Society was a famous secret club.

The students here all had heard about them at least at one time.

Their tea parties also worked as gathering, and were carried out with a frequency that was undetermined, but still such that it would not become boring.

The room was beautifully arranged.

On the warmly colored carpet there were a table and chairs of nice shapes. On top of its patterned cross there was a well-polished silver tea set.

The windbreaker wall of wooden planks was covered with an ethnically rich tapestry.

There were four girls in the room.

Fifth graders and fourth graders, two each.

Both of the fifth graders looked like the insightful and lively types, conversely the fourth graders were both more composed.

"Welcome to the Wild Rose Society's Tea Party."

Seemingly the representative, the fifth grader with chestnut hair said that with a smile.

Having never properly spoken to an upperclassman, I straightened up with a little bit of strain.

"...pleased to make your acquaintance."

"What's that? The thing you have in hand?"

The black-haired fifth grader asked that with a tone that implied urgency.

Curly Hair answered in my stead.

"It's amazing, it's cakes! Totally different from the fake ones we've had so far!"

"Don't call them fakes!," laughed Black Hair.

"If you would like, then please."

Feeling something unfitting in the mood, I offered the large plate with the cakes on it.

The place immediately became cheerful.

"Bwah, this is on a serious scale."

"Uh-huh. That's something only Youngest Child would say."

The two upperclasswomen expressed their opinions on the cakes on the plate.

Seems that Youngest Child was Curly Hair's nickname.

"That's amazing." "Yup."

The two fourth graders also agreed.

"So, please sit down, all right."

I was made to sit in between the two upperclasswomen.

"There's no seat for Youngest Child!"

"I'll be here."

Curly Hair sat on my lap.

"...bother."

Being a socialite was hard.

"First, let's try some. Tea, if you please."

"Yes, senpai." "Right away."

A tea party on which dark clouds hung had begun.

"Really delicious, this one."

Chestnut Hair the fifth grader said that ecstatically. She was called Hana-senpai.

"You want to hear the opinion of the one in charge of teacakes, right?"

It was a question for Dark Hair, the other fifth grader.

"These are hand made, correct?"

Conversely, she was Witch-senpai. That was came from her long dark hair. Just her being there added the flower of exoticism to the room.

"Yes, they are, ma'am."

"No need to become formal, all right? All the girls here know their manners. As long as you're not rude, you can relax, we won't mind."

"Thank you."

But even told that, my strain did not go away.

My history of being in the darkness had been long, and it appeared that the beauty of light had become hard for me to deal with.

How do I get through today... I sipped the tea I had been offered as I carefully deliberated that.

"Say you, what did you do for the ingredients for this stuff?" Witch-senpai uttered a question.

"Just normally, I set aside what was left over during meals..."

"And that means you saved up the lumps of sugar that they serve with morning coffee?"

"Yes."

"But that wouldn't be enough, still?" went Hana-senpai.

A natural question.

"I stocked up. Persistently. It also served as stoicism practice. Besides the lumps of sugar, the cheese and the butter for the toasts, the fruits, the marmalade, the honey, a large number of items. Corn flakes were also good. They are convenient for many things when crushed and mixed in. Many students leave fruits behind, depending on the type, and I did not miss out on them. Apples and orange, while hard to eat on their own, are superlative as ingredients, and when I put these in the dessert it was just time to stir. I managed that by taking over in the stead of the person in charge of leftover food. Of course, as reward for taking over their burden, I received bonus chocolate and crackers. Walnuts I set my mind to and gathered in the woods, there were many tree berries that could be used. There were seemingly no rivals for these things, so the nearby woods were something of my own personal hunting grounds, you see. Cream was actually simple to supply, I made it myself from milk. I put it in a bowl, laid a muslin cloth on it, left it alone, and it raised, I only needed to scoop it up. I mixed in melted chocolate and I had chocolate cream. Eggs and flour I received from the galley."

All present gave me speechless eyes.

"...what a pro."

"...a pro indeed."

"That's amazing." "Yup."

I ended up gaining their attention.

"Eheh."

Curly Hair acted all elated in my stead.

Hana-senpai made a wry smile as she said this.

"And all that stuff, did you learn it from someone, I wonder? Your mother?"

"No, I researched everything in the library... I had time..."

"Amazing, you really are a superlative student and much can be expected from you."

"Are you sure you are talking about me?"

Witch-senpai nodded with altogether too much amusement.

"Right. This was in the rumors."

"It must not have been quite the nice rumor, I see..."

"That's not true. Right?"

"Indeed." "Yes."

Hana-senpai turned to them and the two fourth graders agreed simultaneously.

Curly Hair said this with an all too glowing face.

"That's because, in good or in bad, you and that person are the focus of attention, onee-san."

"That person?"

"The silver haired one..."

I realized right away. It was Y.

"So I am... as much the subject of rumors as her?"

"That face says that you think you managed to not stand out, right?" Witch-senpai smothered a laugh. "Sad to say that a person like you, who never mingles and is always alone, simply stands out."

"I-, is that right..."

Unbelievable that I would be treated the same as *that* girl.

The senpais were deep in talk.

"I wanted to call that girl, too. Silver hair-chan. Wonder if she'd come."

"I do think it difficult, that girl, she's the perfect anti-authoritarian, isn't she."

"My, so we are the authorities?"

Hana-senpai pointed at herself as she asked.

"Well, couldn't we be? How did we see the Wild Rose Society when we were underclassmen?"

"I've been a member of the Wild Rose Society since first grade."

"Awww, what an unpleasant woman. Are you the type to be loved by the world?"

"Say, Sweets-chan, don't you talk with that girl?"

The conversations of the senpais suddenly turned towards me.

"...S-, Sweets?"

"Isn't that nice? It fits you right." "Well, it's obvious. Unless you don't like it." "Onee-san, in the Wild Rose Society we don't call ourselves by real names, but by secret names." "Normally it's fine as usual." "Right, like during classes."

The five people explained all together.

"I see, well, I do not really dislike it."

And so it was decided, Witch-senpai chuckled to herself, and she offered me the names register as she took it from a shelf.

"What is this?"

"Could you write your real name, your date of birth, and your hometown here?"

"Not that, I mean, what is this register?"

Witch stuck out her tongue.

"Something of a member's roster."

"No, no, no."

"No? No no matter what?"

Hana-senpai put her hands together as if praying and stared at me.

"...I am not... saying no... no matter what..."

"Let's call this an initiation ceremony of sorts. Didn't you hear? More like, you avoided

explaining that part, did you, Youngest Child?"

The little girl on my lap laughed with a muffled voice.

"No... I am... alone, so..."

"We're not that dangerous an organization, you know? We may be secret, but we're official. And besides, it's not like we have strict rules."

"My curfew is strict, so..."

"And she want and said something funny."

"Just join up! It's definitely going to be fun, you know? Right, senpais?"

"It's fun." "Yup."

The two fourth graders looked at each other and agreed.

"Uhm," I searched for a reason to refuse. I spoke the first reason I found as result of the search. "About inviting her."

"Silver hair-chan?"

"Yes... I am... not very good with her."

"You aren't? Too bad!" went Hana-senpai.

"I see. You are both lone wolves and therefore antagonistic," went Witch-senpai.

"There have been things."

"But, you know. What do we do, Hana?"

"Well, of course I want the bird in the hand, but... well, you'll join so long as we don't invite silver hair-chan?"

"Well..."

The discussion continued with my joining as premise.

These senpais were quite pushy...

"So, let's do it like this, all right? Right? You really need to join, yes! You really need to join! You really need to join!"

Everybody except me starting chanting that I really needed to join.

And I went with the rhythm and lifted my fist up high, chased to a mental cliff's edge.

And eventually...

"...fine."

Curly Hair raised both hands and screamed out in joy.

"Welcome to the Wild Rose Society. Do you have any questions?"

Witch-senpai's question I answered with plain dazedness.

"What are the procedures for resignation?"

Tea Party

Once I had come to be affiliated to the Wild Rose Society, my life changed a little.

In the classroom I was unchangedly alone.

I sat at my seat near the window and lived a life of nothing whatsoever except classes.

When I was able to concentrate, the fetters of the world became nothing.

To me, studying was itself an escape from reality.

Lunch I could not avoid having together with Curly Hair.

Her bullying stopped.

I had done several things to try to make it stop, but I did not tell that to her.

Since her being any more grateful would be irritating.

The people who did that kind of thing were unexpectedly cowardly, and once threatened a little, with also the possibility of expulsion mixed in, they immediately buried the hatchet.

And they all lived happily ever after.
 Becoming alone seemed to also becoming traumatic for her.
 Even now that the bullying had stopped, she never left my side.
 I could not quite get used to her excessive approaches.
 Also, it appeared I was quite to the liking of the two fifth graders.
 It seemed both of them had, incredibly, been prefects.
 As both of them were fifth graders, they had to have been that good, indeed.
 Now then, my job at the tea party was to provide sweets.
 I was not dissatisfied with that job.
 It was a rarely gained chance to put into practice the knowledge written in books.
 The maidens' unrestrained critiques were helpful.
 And as I was spending my days like that, eventually the end of school term came.
 Though the majority of students at The School come from far away, the near totality did not return to their families during the break between terms but remained there, spending the vacation in the dorm.
 I was not an exception.
 Then came the day of the ending ceremony.
 During vacation I was as always indulging in reading, and I had just picked a massive number of books from the library and was returning to my room when I received an emergency summons.
 "And so, we begin our yearly Wild Rose Society event, the search for hidden rooms!" Hana-senpai announced that.
 On the table there was not the usual tea set, but massive piles of what seemed to be scrapbooks.
 "So what do we do this year. Once in a while we should actually go out and search, right?"
 "Oppooosed. I want the usual conjecture partyyy!"
 "Conjectures are fine." "That's right!"
 That was the picture of the AB-senpais, the fourth graders, agreeing with the conversation between Witch and Curly Hair.
 "First time I have heard of this."
 Thinking it would be a normal tea party, I could not follow the conversation.
 "This is all news to me!"
 "Then speak to you I shall of the legendary truth."
 Hana-senpai drew her face into a serious expression and said that with an artificially weighty voice.
 "The true goal of the Wild Rose Society was to search for the legend handed down here at The School... the fairies' tea party. Tah-dah!"
 "The fairies'... tea party?" There was something there that stimulated part of my awareness.
 "What kind of thing is a fairy tea party?"
 "The fairies' tea part is... what else, a tea party with the fairies. Tah-dah-dah!"
 "That was the perfect picture of a non-explanation, Hana."
 "...the fairies, you mean those fairies?"
Ask me, ask me!, Curly Hair made a happy face and stared at me, so I tossed her that question.
 "I don't really know about all that, but it seems to be a fairly promising theory among the conjectures that have been made in the generations of the Wild Rose Society!"
 She opened a file that was on the desk as she vigorously argued that.

"Conjectures through the generations...?"

"The Wild Rose Society is an organization with traditions, and as we gathered and gathered conjectures we came to build this mountain. Tah-dah-dah-dah!"

"These are all records of conjectures...?"

"We got some here too, Sweets-chan."

Hana-senpai opened a locker on the rear side of the couch.

A volume of documents that was truly to *tah-dah* about was stuffed tight in there.

"I was wondering what was inside there..."

"After all, this comes from several hundred years... or maybe several thousand years in the past. Have a look. Records around this age here are really bad off. They're on stone slabs!"

"I do not believe they would be that old, however."

"Maybe people in the past had yet to develop paper?"

Hana-senpai said that like a poet.

"And I am telling you that this school did not exist in those ages."

"It appears to be just a marvelous gag."

"Now just what sort of conjectures..."

Just to see I ran my eyes over several of the files.

The first one I had casually opened came from five hundred years ago.

It looked like that in this age they were serious about searching.

They walked around the school, investigating even the dormitory's fourth building...

"It says the fourth building. Is it gone now?"

"Seems it existed in the past, you know?"

I went for another file.

"Wah, eighteen hundred years ago it says, this has to be a joke...?"

"We can't determine the authenticity of the reports. That's an iron rule of the Wild Rose Society. Tah-dah-dah-dah-dah!"

Today Hana-senpai was weird.

"This one is from seventy years ago... a second building?"

Another document. Thirty years ago.

"Mh-hm."

Around then was when they stopped investigating.

They only made conjectures while having tea.

Starting from around ten years ago, the association did not even conjecture and only chatted.

"In other words... it was reduced to a formality?"

"Exactly," said Witch-senpai.

"Even if we tried to search, the location itself might've been lost, see."

"But just talking about it is fun." "Yup."

"And that's why I had you prepare a lot more sweets than usual."

"It's just that we wanted to chatter and make noise, nothing else. Tah-dah! Dah!"

I saw an invisible flower blooming on Hana-senpai's head (and the type who sucked the nourishment from the brain, too).

"Still, this is all interesting..."

I was unexpectedly not bored.

As I read several of the files I somehow understood.

The fairies' tea party...

It was a legend handed down at The School.

A secret tea party being held by the fairies was somewhere within the grounds.

Those who find it will be granted the greatest of riches and glory... or not, nobody knew, but it was about unveiling a legend so they generally expected a reward, and it seemed that at some point it became an established fact and was carried into the legend itself.

"...it is going to take time, if done seriously, this."

"We aren't doing that seriously. Besides, we got a lot of them conjectures..."

"Right. We verify the conjectures that have already been made... or at least we call it that and just indulge in chatting, that's the new tradition."

"Senpais... you just wanted a pretext to make noise, I see."

With that pointed out to them, Hana and Witch senpais just smiled as per their usual. Happily so.

"Ngh, there's times when you do things seriously and there's times to do things that have nothing whatsoever to do with anything, depending on the era."

"Onee-san, do you want to investigate this seriously?"

"...well, that does sound fun."

The puzzle pieces bounced around inside my head.

A hidden room. An old map. The fairies' tea party. Building materials with advanced capabilities. Dormitories, four of them. And the fairies.

"Just to say it, but we got a rule that says that researching the legend's only done on vacations," went Witch-senpai.

On vacations... so when the students were gone?

The present aside, in the past the students went back to their hometowns during long vacations. It was a situation of depopulation or near such. If the students were gone... extensions and structural alterations were possible. And a hidden room...

What was this? Something was bothering me.

"Look, senpai, this part of the document seems to be missing...?"

"That's true. I wonder if there was some square cutout in it. This was left behind only after it had contained something."

"I am thinking if maybe it did have a map, maybe..."

It was the record of a serious investigation.

Even in the past there were people who had noticed that the construction of the main building was strange.

"Huh, this thing, I'm sure... even silver hair-chan was interested about this."

Hana-senpai said something unbelievable.

"Ah, what did you say?"

"It's from when silver hair-chan was still coming here, you see?"

"That is news to me!"

"So I didn't tell you?"

"I have never heard of this!"

"But if I'd told you you'd never have joined, right?"

"Of course!"

"Then I was right!"

"I am going to fight this!"

"...truth is I just forgot to tell you, see. That girl was in the Association before you joined, Sweets-chan. But she wouldn't participate to the meetings, she wasn't really friendly, it kinda made us feel like you two were really of a different species, and we felt down."

"But you liked her, Hana, the weirdo that she was."

"Yeeeah, if only she opened her heart a little bit more... but now we have Sweets-chan, so it's

fine. Not lonely anymore!"

"But see," went Witch-senpai.

"...c'mon."

Curly Hair hugged me from behind.

"I've never really talked to that person, really."

"Now why did she join the Wild Rose Society? Did anyone ask?"

It was Witch-senpai who answered that question.

"I guess she was interested in the legend of the fairy tea party. Looked like she'd been researching it for a time. She went back and forth from here of her own accord."

"She has been investigating for a fairly long time, you know?"

Those words tossed cold water on my intracerebral puzzle.

The cold and wet pieces one by one fit together—

And the next thing I noticed was that I was standing alone in a corridor in the dormitory.

I was thinking with my hand on a wall.

There was something indistinct there.

Though I could not be expected to know the answer, for some reason I had a feeling that said I had forgotten.

Mental Labor

"Sweets-chaaan, wanna plaaay?"

With devil-may-care Hana-senpai as first on the list, the people of the Wild Rose Society came into the club room.

I was spiritually exhausted.

"If you don't bless us with sweet and delicious things I'm gonna throw a tantrum right here and now."

Witch-senpai said something that might just deprive her of the dignity of a senpai.

"Ahhh, girls... it has been a while..."

"Onee-san, what happened?," went Curly Hair.

I stood up and set the plate of sweets I had made on the table.

"Ah, baked sweets!"

The beautiful and pure-hearted starving wolves (♀) swarmed the plate all at once.

I can say that they finished eating in an instant.

"More."

"Next time..."

I very inappropriately laid down on the bed.

The girls looked at each other.

As representative, Curly Hair came to peek in with a worried face.

"...what happened? If something worries you, then you could talk to us..."

"No, that is not it..."

"Then how come?"

"It is just that I have been doing repetitive work that uses the head for too long."

"For homework?"

"I have been making a list... one of stolen books."

I had investigated a great many things during vacation.

I reeled in countless lines, and the first thing I thought I absolutely needed to investigate was that list.

"Ah, is this..." "So it was here."
The AB-senpais took a volume from above the desk and said this.
"What's that book?"
"It's a tale of love." "Set in a boys' dormitory."
"Love in a boys' dorm?"
The two of them nodded simultaneously.
"...ahhh, that kind of thing."
"It's really interesting." "It's wonderful."
The voices of the two overlapped.
"But for some reason it disappeared from the library."
"Did you borrow it, sweets-chan?"
"That... I just picked it up..."
A strong sleepiness came to me, and I charged into a sweet afternoon nap.
Curly Hair picked up the half-finished list.
"Musa Puerilis? Collected boy's love poetry from ancient Greece? And also... Satyricon...
Death in Venice... Narcissus and Goldmund...?"
"Is that there the list of stolen books? There's really a lot of them," went Hana-senpai.
"I wonder why she thought of making this, that girl."
In a corner of my nearly-interrupted consciousness, I heard Hana-senpai sighing.
"The one thing that's certain is that both the girls I like are the types that love researching
more than talking, that's what. Why be so boring, I wonder."

Dealing with the World

My studying bore fruit, and I successfully advanced to the fourth grade.
"Onee-san, so mean, you went up too fast!"
"I do not care."
Farewell, Curly Hair. Welcome, new grade. The first class put me in an exhilarated mood.
It was just that when I saw that Y was in the seat next to mine I experienced just a little
vertigo.
"Now ain't that broomhead gone."
"So what."
I had my senpais clean up my hair.
"...nothing."
Being set side by side with someone who made fun of her was seemingly not amusing,
because she suddenly faced forwards.
A new environment had a new mood.
That was because, those who went up in grades with the new term aside, the people who
were originally in the fourth grade did not have any prejudice towards me.
"Why you, you're the new entry in the Wild Rose Society, I hear?"
"What did you go through to join?"
"Unless you're introduced by someone who's already a member you can't join, right? That's
so nice. Come on, listen to me."
Perhaps it was the effect of the Wild Rose Society.
I was not used to being fawned over, it sort of made me feel self-conscious.
Perhaps it was the effect of the Wild Rose Society.
Though I had this torrent of people talk to me, a smile that I once did not have started

appearing naturally on my face (though it was an insincere one).
That was a good result, I believed, a good way to grow up.
However, this sort of awkwardness towards the girl next to me never went away.
"...smiles can go die. What a worthless woman."
Those words that I could not decide if they were soliloquy or pointing out came with tremendous pain.
"Why you..."
However, Y never tried to meet eyes with me anymore.
Class begun. Class ended.
The next class began. The class ended again.
The time block after that begun, and thirty minutes passed.
"If it'd been me, I wouldn't really be able to bear it."
She suddenly whispered.
"That is because you are weak."
I promptly spoke back.
"...and I even cried."
"You too cry when you are alone, do you not?"
I just spoke whatever came to mind.
Humans with infinite strength did not exist, I thought.
Everybody, behind the stage, had many issues to themselves, did they not, that I believed.
There was no reply.
Perhaps what I had said hit the mark and she was at a loss for words, perhaps she was tired of this irritating exchange, but there was not enough I could see from the side that would have helped me determine what it was.
Even as she stared straight forwards, her superficially preserved profile was cold and stiff.
In a week of being classmates (or to depict it more accurately, as complete strangers who just happened to be in the same class), I saw many things.
First, that she was truly alone.
She never spoke to anyone, her lunches were always alone.
At recreation times she was either reading or aimlessly wandering somewhere.
It also happened that she failed to attend classes without permission.
"...that's a girl you really shouldn't get involved with."
The classmates were all as one in saying the same thing.
She was derisive towards everybody, and she was feared and hated.
Though she was an excellent student who had skipped grades many times, her ill behavior had her detained in the fourth grade, the one appropriate to her age.
Of course, I had no intention of being friendly with her, either.
It was just that, I supposed, I had this presentment that I might encounter her unexpectedly wherever I was going to go to.
A quiet before the storm, perhaps.
No longer being made fun of like in the past, I spent days in peace.
It was just that, on the occasion, she came to be abusive towards me.
"Does milady enjoy playing house with people?"
"But, you know, people may think that you're lovely, but that's only appearances."
"Humans are so tedious. They're foul creatures. Women especially so."

Let Us Meet in the Secret Messy Room

I discovered a hidden passage in the dormitory.

To be accurate, I should say I re-discovered it.

On the wall's pattern, following right along the checkerboard pattern, there was a door hollowed out.

Perhaps to ensure it was not noticed as a door from the corridor, it had nothing like a knob. I pushed forcefully and so noticed that it had a peculiar way of opening, it was the type that you slid to the side.

Darkness spread beyond it.

It was not wooden past the wall.

It seemed to be built with something like flexible metal, some substance pliable yet robust.

It had to have been an ancient building material, of course.

It was thinkable that, as a result of repeated remodeling, the areas made of wood gradually increased, and eventually covered everything else.

I lit my lamp and walked on towards the depths of the darkness.

It was a narrow corridor. Two people could not pass past each other. I advanced for a little while and found a corner. I proceeded straight again and found a door in a dead end. There were no splits, it was a linear path.

I felt a presence on the other side of the door.

"...it's not here... I knew it, someone took it away back then... dammit."

Ahead there was a muffled voice, one very very full of unease.

The person seemed to be giving me their back as they stifled their voice.

I unlit the lamp and unhurriedly opened the door, so as to not be noticed.

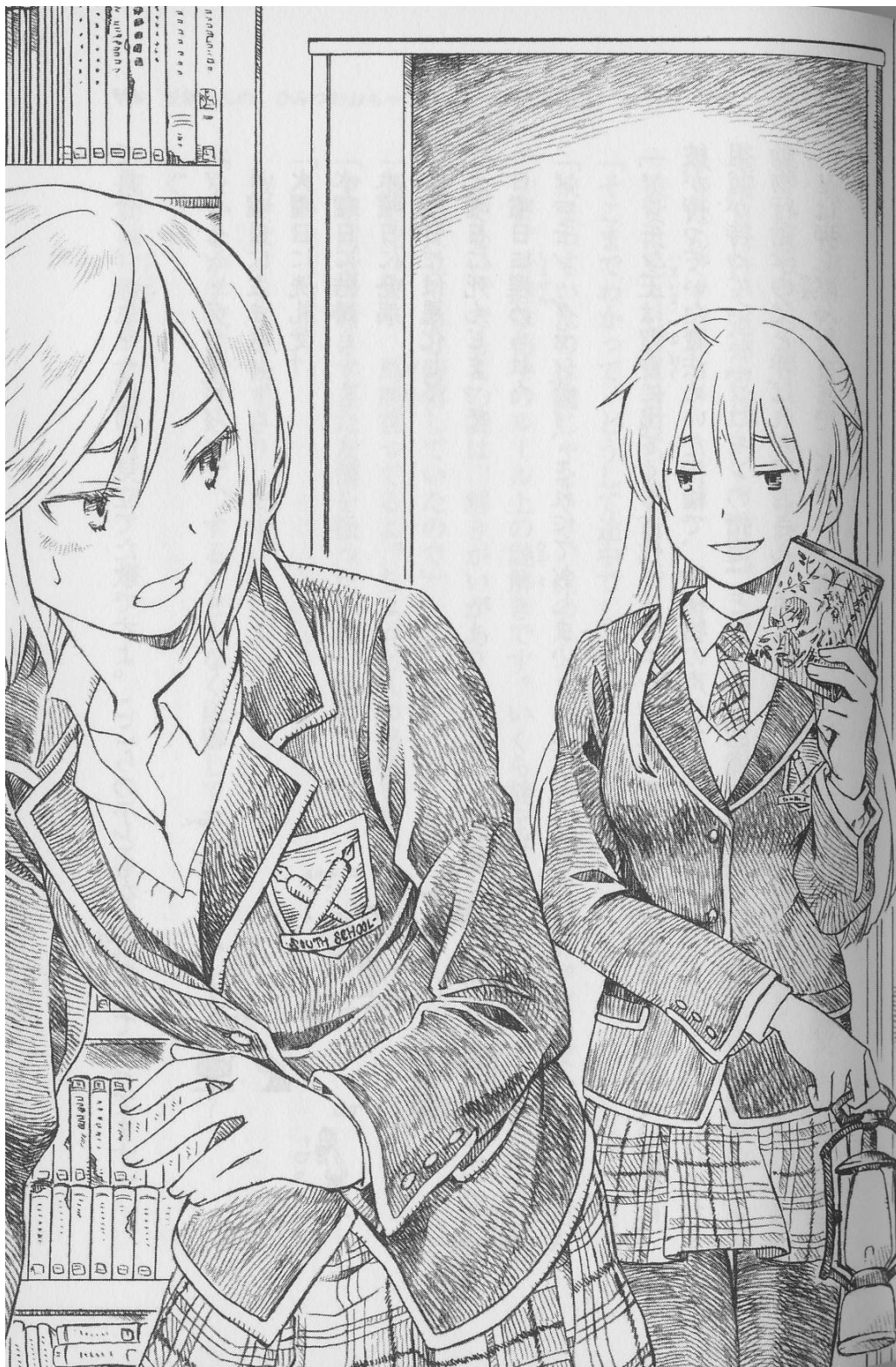
Lighting was lit inside the room.

There were rows of countless bookshelves big and small, filled with a massive number of books.

"This is what you are looking for, right?"

The girl stiffened with a start.

Terrified she turned her head back, putting her eyes on the paperback I was holding up in my hand.



It was a novel aimed at juniors called *The Heart of Thomas in the Sky*. Just, what was in it was comparatively screwball for being aimed at juniors. To the point that when I read it, *bwah!*, I bent backwards.

"Well, I read it too, and it was quite the interesting novel."

"It's you..."

"Quite the marvelous hobby you have. And you are not half-dedicated to this either, I see. Well done getting so many together. But they are all stolen goods. From the library."

Y's face turned pale.

"...so it was you. You made the mess in here."

"No, I did not make any mess. It seems I just discovered it by accident."

"But how. You couldn't even solve a simple riddle..."

"Riddle, you mean that thing from years ago? The one from when I enrolled."

I have had my room sealed and the key hidden by this girl.

"That's right. You couldn't even touch that. So you finding this room would be impossible. You followed me, right?!"

"I sooo did not follow you. Do not talk nonsense."

I said that to make fun of her, and Y came to grab me.

"Give it back!"

"I will give it back, I am not into these things."

I tossed the paperback and Y caught it in a panic.

"The animals know the location of the key. But be careful! It can only be found on the day the disease gets worse... was it that?"

The riddle I had abandoned on that day still remained in my memories.

"It was not like I had not solved it, that thing there. It was Solomon Grundy, right? The one from Mother Goose. He hears the voices of the animals, so you did combine that with King Solomon, right, but whatever else, is that not too simple? Solomon Grundy and King Solomon may have the same names, but they have nothing to do with each other, do they."

Y's lips twitched.

"Besides, riddles, well, they are altogether too childish, indeed, as far as concepts. What did you think you were going to accomplish by making fun of a just-enrolled person? There are children who cannot approach people they wish to be friends with except in those ways, but doing things like that would only get you hated."

"I heard that, you know! I didn't want to be friends with you. Besides, you call it childish, but you still haven't proven you've solved it."

"I can prove it. In the life of Solomon Grundy, he was born on a Sunday, he was christened on a Tuesday, and so on, the nursery rhyme has his life lived in a single week. Any child would know this."

Solomon Grundy,
Born on a Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Took ill on Thursday,
Grew worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday,
That was the end,
Of Solomon Grundy.



"King Solomon was a king of ancient Israel that appears in the Bible. The Seal of Solomon was a magical ring that he owned, and he could hear the voices of plants and animal. More importantly, I was aware of that because of a book called King Solomon's Ring that my father owns. The author was Lorenz, a scholar called the father of zoology."

Y remained silent.

"The disease grew worse on a Friday. It could only be found on Friday. The hint was the voice of the animals. The conclusion could only be one, right? That was why I was about to go to the library on that day. And that I would search for the key inside a King Solomon's Ring book that had been returned on a Friday."

She clicked her tongue in annoyance.

"If you got that far, then why didn't you just..."

"Because what might have been inside it might not have been the key, but an invitation to a next riddle. It was getting really silly. In the end, it was just solving riddles according to the rules of an opponent. No matter how many riddles I solved, there was no profit in it for me. But solving this riddle had a reward. After all, once solved, I would have the confidence that I could stand above you."

"Above me? You're talking nonsense. You just discovered a little secret, that's all."

"You like novels that deal with boys that have gone beyond the friendship, correct."

"Ngh!"

She shook and stepped back.

"You could not quite fit into the school, and with nothing to do you started reading, and got addicted, right?"

"Gh!"

She went down to one knee.

"That library was plentiful with books of that sort. Before you stole them all, that is. And then, here we are. This... library specialized in same-sex love. You gathered and gathered and came to have a jewel of a collection, indeed. Ahhh, how wonderful, yes. Reeaaally dreamy

indeed. A dream that rarely comes true in reality."

"...shut up."

"And the proof is given. While I was there, I also done and analyzed what you are inside. All you have is a high pride, and an obstentatiousness and a stubbornness that aggravated your loneliness! To desperately preserve that dignity that exists only for show, you even took over this hidden room so as to keep your hobby hidden, this one! And that one! And that one there! All of them, all of them about boys who went beyond the friendship. This is serious! So shocking it is terrifying!"

Y did nothing but cower and shiver her shoulders.

"Also, you were also the one who went around disposing of sketch maps, so that no one could investigate the history of this remodeled dormitory. There were four buildings here in the past, you see. And they, seriously, just joined them together and made a single big dorm... and that is why the structure is so pointlessly complicated. With the progress of technology it seems that they came to have techniques such that even non-specialists could change the structure, and that is why there are so many absurd buildings like this left over. As far as I am concerned, I am far more interested in that than in boys who went beyond friendship, however."

Y did not move anymore.

It seemed that she had been met with psychological death.

"...I thought that if I left it alone... I would use the legend of the fairies' tea party as excuse... and discovered it..."

She said that with a hoarse voice.

"I think that plausible. Seems your affiliation with the Wild Rose Society was also to investigate those documents."

"That's... not true..."

"That is completely true."

"Really, that's not true... I was just invited in normally in the beginning... I couldn't get used to the school, so I wanted to at least fit in in a circle..." her words cut off. "And then I learned."

"You learned?"

"Say, what do you think you're going to do about all this?" asked Y fearfully.

"Why of course, it is going to be a fun topic for discussion while we sit at a tea party..."

Y came to cling to me. This felt so very good.

"...I beg you... don't."

"Should I not, I wonder. But of course, my friends in a circle are more important than some mean classmate. I finally managed to build good relationships, I am in charge of sweets, and gossip is the sweetest accompaniment for tea."

"Let's make a deal."

Y's voice felt supplicating.

"I am sorry, but I appear to have no interest in books about boys who went beyond friendship."

"Not that. Information! I'll tell you some really good things. Stuff that will help you."

"Information, huh... the whereabouts of the fairies' tea party, for example?"

"I'm also searching for them. And for real, you know. But I mean different information from that. You could call it calamitous information."

"A calamity?"

Judging that I had expressed interest, she stood up.

"Come."

Saying that, she firmly pushed the wall.

There was the growling sound of a motor, the wall pulled back, and a new passage appeared.

The Secret Passage

Following after Y, I walked a narrow dark passage.

"You said you were searching for the fairies' tea party. Was this passage also one of the things you discovered?"

"It was. There's lots of dead space that hasn't been discovered in this building. There's complicated locations and there's separated locations, they're just everywhere."

"Are you saying they happened by coincidence during expansions?"

"They sure don't seem to have been planned. Still, for all that, it feels way overdone. It's possible that the people who did the expansion wanted this structure. Might be that they just wanted hidden passages no matter what."

"Where does this lead to?"

"You'll see right away."

"It is not that... you are trying to shut me up, right?"

"Could you not refer to people like they were violent criminals? I'm just a girl. I just got sort of long a history of being alone."

"And you just sort of like boys who went beyond friendship, unquote."

"...you just keep making fun of me. I'm going to astonish you."

We walked for a while, then her feet stopped.

"We're here. From here you can see what's going on over there. Have a look. But don't shout. We're gonna get noticed."

There was a tiny hole where she was pointing.

I tried peeking inside and saw whose room this was.

"Women, well, the better the woman they are, the scarier the animal they become," she whispered at my ear. It was Hana-senpai's room. Was there anyone inside?

"There is nobody... but..."

"Good, then let's go in."

She fiddled around nearby and, just like before, a gap that could be passed through formed in the wall.

"We are entering without permission, really..."

"It's something that you gotta see to understand."

Y stooped over and moved, went around the desk, and took out a notebook from the drawer.

"Found it. This is it. Have a read."

The notebook was packed tight with detailed writing. My eyes prickled.

What was inside went like this.

o/X I was betrayed by *** (real name hidden to protect privacy). She came four minutes later than we arranged. No apologies. Sentence ★★.

o/X I encountered *** in the corridor, and she bumped my shoulder. No apologies. Sentence ★.

o/X *** was absent from a Wild Rose Society meeting. She apologized. However, she did not seem repentant. Sentence ★★.

o/X Sweets-chan skipped a meeting again. She apologized. Total number of betrayals has reached fifty. Sentence ★★★.

o/X *** spilled tea in my lap. She apologized. Level of sincerity was high, but she had stained a skirt I had just gotten. Sentence ★★.
o/X Greeted *** but she ignored me. Sentence ★★★.

It was an unsparing record of all the trifling grudges of her daily life.

Right, literally unsparing.

"That woman's the kind that never forgives the harm that's been inflicted her."

A chill went down my spine.

"Is there not some mistake? Because normally she is so nice...?"

"Normally she's nice. But inside she records her grudges, and she's got several of these hidden notebooks. She uses them as a sort of diary."

"My name... appears quite often, it seems?"

"She's not some safe person, see. The more you get close to her, the more the frequency of grudges increases. That's obvious. Being hated to these extents would make even a saint turn pitch black."

"Hyeeeh..."

Unbelievable that that warm and peaceful Hana-senpai would have a secret like this.

"The more she holds things back... well, there's no guarantee that she won't explode at some point. I'm scared of her. Well, this isn't everything, you know. Next one, come on, next one."

She once again went through the hidden corridor and guided me to a different room.

"This is Witch-senpai's. This one's gonna be rough too. Get ready."

"What is going to be rough?"

"...a sexual kind of roughness."

We came to Witch-senpai's room.

"There does not seem like there is anything witch-like here."

Charred newts, or larvae of flies, nothing of the sort was there. It was a normal girl's room.

"But those two senpais normally don't let you enter their rooms, right."

"Now that you say it..."

"Eh, but how do they manage about the inspections?"

"Investigations don't go as far as the contents of the notebooks. And that's why there's many secrets of the written type. But the disposition is sort of different here. There, found it. Have a look."

Yet another notebook. Inside,

"Hyyh?!"

I ended up tossing it away.

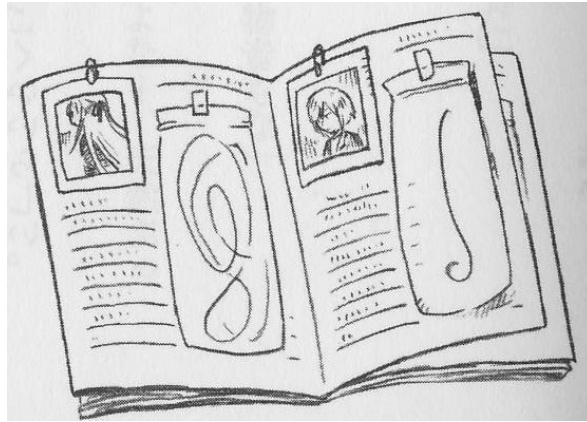
"What is this! What is THIS!"

"...hair. Girls'."

In the notebook there were hairs stuck in bags, attached one per page.

Alongside minute data and photographs of the faces of the girls.

How much nicer would it have been if these had been pressed flowers!



"Hair? Why, for what purpose?"

"The witch... is collecting the hair of the girls she likes."

"...why?"

Y spat this out with a blank look.

"Because she's a witch."

"Well, but that is not really a reason..."

"To say it clearly, it's because she has a fetish. A hair fetish."

"....."

"This here's your hair, right."

"Gyaaah!"

"Seems that you are liked. There's several pages of it. It's long and vibrant, so it looks like it's really good. Once in a while she takes them out of the bags and tastes them, that witch."

"GyahYahYahYaaah!"

"There's mine, too. Here."

"...ooooh..."

"Are you all right?"

".....yuUh..."

"I just can't hear you."

I returned to my senses.

"Wait. How come you did not recover your hair if you learned that?"

"Because I'd lose my secrecy. If I took the hair the witch would notice. That girl thinks she's keeping that hobby a secret. We could ask the prefects, but if we don't do it right it'll be a problem."

"I just want to burn them all, however..."

"You should just give it up. Maybe something bad will happen. Give it up. Come on, next one."

"There are still others?"

"Those twin-like fourth graders... though now they're fifth graders. It's in the room of those two."

Their dark sides was straightforward.

"Now, there's no notebooks or anything. You can just tell by surveying from the hole. Don't speak. No noises either."

Having received that warning, I put one eye to the spy hole.

"Awww whatta pain! Flower, that Hana, she seriously pisses me off!" "Hearing that voice just makes you angry, she acts all airheaded."

I nearly fell over.

Y put a hand on my shoulder and shook her head.

"You know, it's today, right, and I was about to drink some tea, right, and that witch's long hair somehow got in the cup. It was all sticky! Seriously, that's disgusting!" "Ah, that happened to me's, too. That's way gross. Gave me goosebumps. More likes, the girl who cleaned 'em should've actually checked for that, that's what this is about!"

They were different persons.

They had taken off their uniforms and tossed them around, parading around inside the room in their underwear.

They scratched their posterior as they stirred the contents of hip flasks and drank from them. Normally, hip flasks were used to contain alcohol.

"Bwah, sweets may be nice, but I wanna eat some meat." "Oooh, some nice pudding chock full of meat, gimme a belly full."

"You do that, but when I finally met 'er again, she was pregnant. She was gonna be some mother. Gimm'n'me the shivers there, seriously." "'Cause she's got no thinking. Awww-aw, then I ain't calling 'er for parties anymore. Though she was better just in the mug and she reeled in men well."

"Nooow then, what kind of crap do we get for dinner tonight?" "Ain't that vegetables and bread?" "You serious! I really hate that vegetable soup here. It's real crap." "Me's also not liking that stuff. I wanna white soup from sheep." "Oooh, that's really edible crap."

"Yesterday I was so hung over that I seriously threw up my soul in a bucket. And I also left it there."

"Say, do you think that you can just wring out a paper napkin and reuse it?"

I took my eyes and ears away from the peeping hole. And while I was there I felt like I wanted to get my soul away from reality. I thought I should get it away from everything. I thought I should get away like the stars did as the universe expanded away, and as the whole of the universe froze, it should just congeal every single possible activity.

"Come on, next one's last."

"Uhm, given the order so far..."

"Yup. It's that German girl. Well, she's not filthy and she doesn't have sexual fetishes, so you can rest easy."

"I will not be surprised anymore, no matter what comes... this thing 'ere's a game of chance, you get me?"

"You're getting infected... you're getting more than a little bit infected..."

I approached my face to the last peeping hole.

There laid the room that she and I used.

Curly Hair was there.

She had put a doll on the chair that I normally used.

She was serving, she was sitting on the opposite seat, she seemed to be playing what was called house.

"Onee-san, eat this too. How was it? Delicious? Delicious, right? I made it! The secret ingredient is love! It's a stew full of love. Come on, eat, eat. Eat more."

Initially the game of house was innocent.

"...these days, onee-san won't stay with me. I wonder where she goes. Today, too... she's not here. I followed her, but I always lose her. She has a good head, so she doesn't miss anything, I suppose. She should never leave class, too... but even when I said no she just up and advanced grades... she's always leaving me behind... despite how I like her so much..."

Curly Hair stared at the doll in silence.

Then, suddenly, she tossed the hot tea from the cup at the doll.

"Ahhh, sorry! It was an accident... sorry, onee-san... I had just... gotten angry for some reason... what a mess, I will clean right away..... it's tea, so I should just lick it, right? It's a waste, right? Aaah..."

Curly Hair sucked the wet part of the doll.

"With something like this you might get a scald, you know? If you get your face burned, you might never be able to go out again. That might also be nice... sigh, what do you think? It's all right, I'll nurse you... sigh, even for the rest of your life... the town I live in, see, has few people so you won't be in the way....."

I thought she would sunk into silence again, but Curly Hair instead suddenly made a weird noise and punched away the doll.

She lost her calmness, grabbed the doll, struck it with the flat of the hand, and as a conclusion began to repeatedly stab it with the fruit knife.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!"

She made a weird voice that I felt I had never heard from her before.

Y and I were so scared that we shrunk back, doing nothing but hug each other's shoulders in the darkness and shiver.

"Tonight she won't come back to the room, won't she!"

After we had returned to a safe environment, I snapped at her. "Why did you shove my face into the truth!"

"...why you, you're not thinking that it was better for you not to know?"

"This is preposterous! I thought the mood at the Wild Rose Society was like an Andersen fairy tale!"

"And in truth it was a An-diseased fairy tale."

"Please shut up! I do not want to hear!"

"You should go back to your room, you know. If you sleep outside or something, that thing there might do something to you."

"Something like what?"

"...well, that golden haired girl seems to be unable to control her own emotions, so... I'm guessing something had to have happened when she was a kid, right. Something Freud-like."

"And what face should I make when I go talk to her..."

Mostly faded, casual events passed past one after another in my head.

"It's fine! Don't worry about it. It's just got some cream on it. Don't apologize that much!"

"Your hair has so many split ends. I'll clean them up for you. What a nice gloss! They're so long, so straight, and they smell so good. They're so cute."

"Onee-san, onee-san, can we sleep together tonight? You know that when you sleep together you have the same dream?"

"All of it...?"

"You get it right. Children just aren't healthy and pure beings. In an environment like this, things particularly weird are ignored. It's rare to find people like you that you can really trust."

"And that is why you tested me?"

"Well, being alone's been hard enough, you see. I thought that maybe if I had friends I could even find the fairies."

"The fairies' tea party..."

"If you find it, all your wishes will come true. Doesn't that entice you, even if the rumor is false? It enticed me, really. If there's really a reward, I want it all. But what's necessary most of all is fellow people I can give trust to. People hiding nothing behind them."

"Am I someone you can trust?"

"I don't trust human nature. But you're not hiding anything behind you. You're not good at lying, and it's easy to tell when you're being malicious, so that's enough. You seem to have the same level of vulgarity that I do. It's not bad."

"...you are not praising me with that."

"I'm not praising you. But you get it, right? Having a little scoundrel or a vulgar person that's easy to tell nearby makes me relieved. I don't want to get close to women that have darkness in their hearts."

I sunk into silence and Y made a proposal.

"How 'bout we join up?"

Partners

"Say, I happen to have found this."

"Does it look promising this time? It is just that few of the documents that you provide are reliable."

"That's what folklore's about, you know."

Y and I furtively began our work.

Two lone wolves working together stood out tremendously, and it seemed we came to be subjected to a few rumors, but, well, there was nothing to be done about it.

The formation of the legend of the fairies' tea party took a long time, so false rumors, hearsay, and wishful thinking was jumbled into it, turning it into a complicated and hard to untie knot.

"Don't think we can solve this that easily."

"We must clear this hurdle before graduation."

Our days of searching were all about looking for secret passages.

"Here, a love letter from a hundred seventy years ago."

"It actually managed to survive without rotting, nice one... this thing here, there was someone in third grade class with the same name."

A great many things had fallen into the cracks, and we enjoyed each and every one of them.

Two years later, we advanced together to the fifth grade.

"We managed to escape from fourth grade at last..."

"It took long, indeed..."

"This was stuffed way too tightly. You're way too serious."

"I just wanted to be taught, so it is normal human behavior to want to accept everything."

"That's way too peculiar a way of thinking."

"You are the one with the far too peculiar hobbies."

"Oi, shut it. S-, someone might hear..."

We were worst friends, one of whom owned the heirloom treasure just for herself, that seemed to be our relationship.

Standing on top was fun and it made me happy.

I felt that I wanted to slowly and I mean slowly extract that sword.

"I got a cool image, you know."

Yet, in truth, she was *that* kind of person.

As for the Wild Rose Society, I was somehow managing.

"Onee-san, you know that in the next cricket game you can participate with teams made of the people you want? Can't we do it together?"

"Ah, sorry. I have a previous engagement."

"Eeeh... agaaain..."

Curly Hair slumped her shoulders and seemed dissatisfied, but I would not defy Y to her face. The impression at a glance was that she was scary, and in a certain sense, that was an advantage.

I had considerably improved my skills at cricket.

I no longer missed the strike zone, I had learned the correct cricketing form, and I was often able to take down ten sticks of batter at once.

It was the result of practicing cricket together whenever we found we had free time.

And today there was the first match where we participated together.

"Strike!"

The voice of the referee echoed around the contest venue.

Today we had gotten two strikes already, and although the pitching of the first player missed the strike in the attack phase of the third bout, the second player got a spare, and at present things were moving smoothly and in order.

Although Witch-senpai, who was in the opponent team, managed a strike in the third bout, in the following attack phase of the fourth bout Y managed a splendid strike where she got all ten batters in one go, continuing our reciprocal coming and going.

"Alright, now I'm gonna beat you two little betrayers right down with my best pitch, my Flipper!"

Hana-senpai cricketed with beautiful form.

"Very skilled, right between the first and third batter... it's gonna go into the pocket."

"Hummm, it was a little thick... this one veered off."

"Laaame!"

As she had announced, Hana-senpai's ball splendidly mowed down ten batters.

"How about that, you two?"

"Your spinner (meaning a curved pitched ball) lives up to your reputation, Hana-senpai," went Y.

Now then, next was the fifth bout, and I was cricketing.

The ball recovery device called the Cricket Machine returned my personal ball, and I cleaned it a bit with a cloth. My personal ball weighted eight pounds. It was the exact weight at which I could give it the most spin.

"Just spare me the gutter at least, partner."

"I have not done that for a long time, I believe."

I mocked her, then cricketed—

"Stop! We stop!"

The principal rushed while gasping for breath.

"What happened?"

The students in the middle of the match gathered around the principal.

"We discovered something terrible..."

The principal rubbed his face with his hands and wrung out his voice.

"The sport that we thought was cricket so far... was actually bowling! Welll, these last two

hundred years we've been making a mistake! Gotta give up, gotta give it up!"
Thump, and one of the student took to their knee.
The mood of all the students presents was that might turn into sand at any moment and disappear.

Joining Forces

"Now then, with that done, I believe it's time to begin the unification ceremony for the two Fairy Search Circles, the Wild Rose Society and the Two Lone Wolves. Cheers!"

Everybody lifted the glasses they had in hand.

"I'm so glad, I'm so glad, this settles everything pacifically!"

"Well, I suppose it was expectable."

In short, this event was the reconciliation between the senpais and Y.

Although there was no real enmity, both sides had a bad aftertaste from their relationship and remained estranged, so we should think of what was to come and settle everything... or so went my proposal.

"Come on, say it."

Y poked me with her elbow.

"...I recognize that on that occasion I have caused you problems."

"It's fine, *Result: All Right* so I'll forgive you for everything!"

Hana-senpai smiled cheerfully and waved her hand.

The four senpais were, for the time being, smiling. They agreed to this reconciliatory mood. ...whatever they thought inside of themselves aside.

The only one who seemed overtly dissatisfied was Curly Hair.

I had to persuade her.

"Onee-san, why do you keep being together with this person? Are you being threatened by her...?"

"I am."

"Hey..."

"I knew it!"

We fought for a bit, then,

"I understand," declared Curly Hair. "It certainly appears necessary that I have to watch out that someone like you won't bully my onee-san!"

"...come on, you're being a pain in the ass."

"Please grin and bear it."

We whispered and,

"Hey, please do not get so close to onee-san!"

This much conflict was, well, something I could have her withstand.

"Then we can just fuse up and join the Wild Rose Society, right?"

"Of course, if you're fine with it."

Hana-senpai conveyed Y her consent. There was no need to keep up appearances in here.

"But in exchange, we're going to actually go out and search for the tea party."

"I wonder if we can find it. The people that came before could not make a single dent on that legend," went Witch-senpai.

"These last few decades we haven't really been searching, and we have new facts too. Also, we have to actually leave a tradition behind, or what's left behind will be twisted. Like with cricket."

All present looked at each other.
A memory that bitter was not common.
Everybody was making agreeing faces.
After that came a fun and beautiful school life. Not one sad feeling. Not a single one—

Graduation

That time of full bloom passed by in the blink of an eye, and then came the season of the graduation ceremony.

The time for the sixth-grader senpais to leave The School had come.

"Congratulations for your graduation, senpais."

"Thanks! Wow, I'm going to have to return to my hometown tomorrow and live there, I still can't believe it, though."

For just this occasion, Hana-senpai uttered words that did not hide her tears.

"I've been here since I've been a child, where I'm going may be my hometown but it feels like some foreign country."

Witch-senpai said that deadpan.

The two were going to go back to their own hometowns, and they were going to help their own families while supporting the cultural activities of the UN, that was the job that they were bringing in with them.

As the graduation season approached, the typical flow of things was for us to make deals with UN employees and decide our future course.

We were still fifth graders.

But if things went right, we would become sixth graders on the year after next, and a few years later we would graduate the same as them, getting back on the long road towards our hometowns. As senpai said, that was tremendously difficult to imagine. The hometown we were going to was a foreign place that had no definite image in our memories.

And we were going to go all alone.

"Come on, don't cry, Sweets-chan! I'm gonna get infected too!"

"You're crying already, Hana."

"That's, because I'm still holding back, and a lot!"

The words the senpai spoke as she sighed and sobbed had neither secrets nor anything overt.

Everybody had tears in their eyes.

In this era, once we parted, we would never meet again.

And everybody knew that.

On the night of the graduation ceremony, we chatted until very late.

For just this day there was no lights out, and the students who wished it could stay up as late as they wanted.

As a well-regulated life had been ingrained into us for many long years, when late night came we were still met with a drowsiness difficult to withstand, and with the mental attitude of diligent practitioners who fought with the attacks coming from within we opened our eyes, we strained our ears, and we moved our tongues.

Curly Hair slept like she had fainted, the AB-senpais followed after her, and it was then that Hana-senpai began talking to us like this.

"This may need to be discussed, still I want to entrust the position of the next heads of the Wild Rose Society to you two."

Y and I looked at each other, puzzled.

"But we're not in the highest grades here, you know?"

"It's fine. Those two," and she pointed at the two senpais who were nearly falling asleep.

"They know that being president is difficult, and said no."

"They only want to gossip and eat sweets, those girls," went Witch-senpai.

"But I think it'll be fine. They respect you."

"Which all means that there's no one else that could take over the position of president?"

"Awww, so it was just the process of elimination," said Y with some self-mockery.

"You're wrong. I think you're qualified. I can tell just by looking at you, and I think everybody has the same opinion. You could be presidents together, just like we were. Whatever else, it's been you two who have dragged us forwards these last few years."

Witch-senpai took over speaking.

"It's been fun since you joined, Silver-chan. The hidden corridors were surprising, I was startled to find just how many possibilities we still hadn't investigated. But in the end, we didn't find the tea party... I really want you to carry on this tradition."

"Senpai..."

"Well? No good?"

Without even exchanging looks, both Y and I nodded at the exact same time.

"We will be taking over." "Reverently so."

The faces of crying smiles that the senpais made felt like they had the bottom of thick glass bottles on them, they were blurry.

About Our Futures

I was organizing documents in the principal's office.

The principal's room had technological heating, and the difference in temperature with the outside condensed and turned even the windows sheer white. The principal wiped one such window with his fingertips and gazed lazily at the cold Winter sky from the gap he had cleared. It seems he was more or less thinking about something.

"Shall I brew some tea?"

"Mh? No, don't want any. It's warm."

As I was learning more specialized knowledge now that I had become a fifth grader, I came to be able to use the individual teacher tutoring system.

The teacher I picked was the principal.

I thought competition would be fierce so I applied without any expectations, but as there were no other applicants I was all too easily accepted.

Henceforth, on afternoons four days I week I would go to the principal and receive lessons while taking over miscellaneous duties as a sort of an assistant.

"I'm still remembering when you'd just come here like it was yesterday. You had no friends, but since you had the spirit to try to stand on your own strengths, I wanted to see how you would end up without me acting. And in conclusion, you seem to have gained good friends, even I'm happy."

"Yes sir, thank you."

Praised out of nowhere, I was flustered as I bowed my head.

"Your grades are excellent, and you get things quickly. You look like a frail young lady, but in truth, you got some backbone. Being brazen in the best of meanings is the necessary qualification for becoming a strong scholar. You dive deep into things with all your self. And

we can add your youth to that."

"You are praising me far too much..."

"You have many choices. But you're saying that you're going to go back to your hometown and help your grandfather, right?"

"Yes sir. I am unable to quite understand my Grandfather. When I was a child, we lived together for a brief time... however I know nothing. I believe that if I simply continued like this and headed for some distant post, I would lose any chances of seeing him for the rest of my living days. Consequently, I of course wish to return to my land and do what I can there."

The principal gave a very satisfied nod and wiped his eyes, moved to tears.

"All good to hear."

"You are praising me far too much."

There had been many offers from the people of the UN.

How about Africa, for example.

Some enya-totto in South America, for example.

Egypt is hot these days, for example.

All of them were jobs that looked like they would put my life at risk, this I understood right away.

If I had to choose the most friendly among all the many choices I had, however, there was nothing but returning to my hometown.

And I shall never say it, not that. Tatemae is important.

The Fairies' Tea Party

Time passed by, and I too became a sixth grader.

I also became a prefect.

More like, in the sixth grade, at present, there were only Y and I.

With no space for choices, becoming prefects was inevitable.

"No gratitude, huh, for this job."

But even while she said that, she seemed quite satisfied.

The number of students at The School had also quickly decreased.

At one time there were nearly ninety people, but there were nearly no newly enrolled as people graduated, and now we were barely a dozen.

The presence of people had quickly vanished both in the main building and in the dormitory.

The AB-senpais were also no longer there.

The two had excellent grades, but there were issues with their families, so they left the school partway through school.

The glorious Wild Rose Society now had only three people.

"There's no people, so we can't even get new ones to enroll in the Society... how ironic."

Curly Hair had also grown up to be a mature young lady.

It seemed she had gained a spirit of self-reliance, as of late she would no longer stick close to me like in the past. She had been raised to be a calm girl.

The majority of students were at present living with the roommates they wanted.

Y and I and Curly Hair were also sharing a room.

Everybody had a premonition that we were going to witness the end of the end, and we all felt dazed and dispirited.

The season of graduation approached.

We had not discovered the fairies' tea party.

But there was no need to discover it.

Not so long as we could solve the true nature of the legend.

I wanted to solve this tangled legend before the end of ends came, and graduate with everything made clear.

We spared as much time as we could.

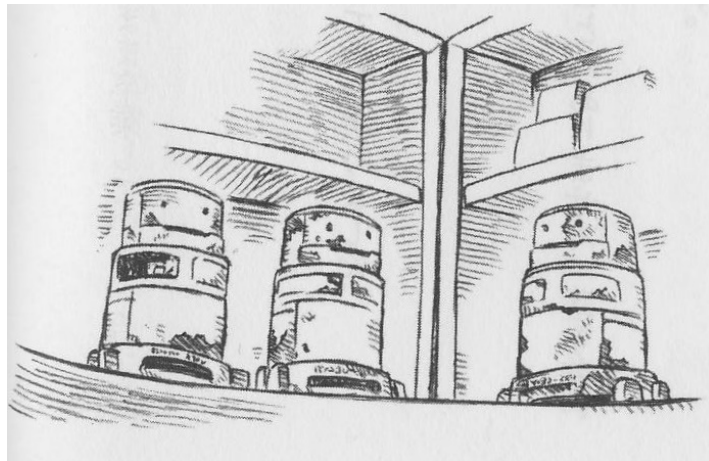
We set our hands to investigate all kinds of places here at The School.

At one time, we discovered a last dead spot, which was likely still undiscovered.

There was a space about the size of a rabbit hutch, and on the shelves that filled every direction there were seven robots.

"These... are robots, right," went Y.

"They're all broken," went Curly Hair.



The robots were all the same type as RYOBO.

"They are fairly old, I see. I wonder if they were working in the past."

"Old, you say, I wonder how old."

"Looking at how they're off, I'd say it wasn't just a few decades..."

"Why are they here?"

Humans would not do something like this, would they?

This place was something of a graveyard.

So who did it?

Who would take a part in this?

"...maybe the fairies."

"Eh?"

"But how would they be able to forget all of this, I wonder..."

"What are you saying, onee-san?"

"The fairies were here. I am sure of it."

With a wave of my overcoat I returned through the path we had come from.

"Hey, where are you going?"

"Today we break off here!"

I headed towards the main building with quick feet so as to search for him.

I went to the fifth grade classroom to find what used to be cheeky brats, now in the course of going from boys to young men, surrounding a textbook.

"Ah, senpai, howdy."

I signaled with one hand for the boys to stop their standing up one after another and stood before the one that used to be their leader.

"...w-, what is it?"

"Do you still recall when you were the imps of the clock tower?"

"Huh, that was when we were brats...?"

Little King: even they, who used to be the school's hooligans, right now had become really diligent and hard-working students.

The reason may lie in how they, in their own ways, felt how they would never again have a chance to learn, having started late in studying and thus having to deal with it frantically.

"So, do you remember how you chased a fairy?"

"Huh, a fairy...?"

That face told everything.

The boy gave a worried gaze to his friends and made a vague smile.

"No, I have never seen a fairy before."

It was a memory that darkened their gazes.

Still, ahhh, of course, right, I also thought.

I could be sure of it, even without any particular reason.

The next day, the closing of The School was announced.

Combined Graduation Ceremony

I was not likely to talk in detail about what happened at the ceremony.

...that was because I showed a disgraceful side of myself.

To speak only of the facts as they were, once we reached the point of closing, the time we had left at The School nearly disappeared.

Both us sixth graders and the students still attending had graduated.

The youngest students were still twelve. Whatever they were to learn would happen after that ceremony.

There were no voices that accused the principal of tyranny for this.

Everybody had expected this conclusion.

This was the decline of humanity, indeed.

After the ceremony the students, each individually and in whatever place they wanted, burned the final scenes in their eyes.

I also went around the places of my memories one after another.

When I caressed my desk with my fingertips, memories leaped around with good force in my head.

The corridors, the walls, and even the club room we used for tea parties, I felt love for everything.

"And so, this will also be the end of the Wild Rose Society."

As I was in the tea party room, Curly Hair came by.

"...what are you doing here?"

"I thought I would clean up the carpets and all that..."

She seemed embarrassed. Perhaps due to the ceremony, her eyes were still twitching a little.

"To let it be known that we were the last members of the Wild Rose Society."

The main building and the dormitory were never going to be used anymore.

There was no need to clean up, but,

"I will help you."

Curly Hair shouted out and cried.

As I was returning to my room in the dormitory I happened upon an usual scene, that of the robot facing a wall and repeatedly slamming into it.

"And this will also be the last of me fixing this for you."

I turned its stockpot-like frame towards the corridor.

"Are you coming home with me? I think there will be all the work you could want."

RYOBO made his eyes flicker on and off, then spat out a message.

"Thank you for your request. I can't accept your order. Please check communication status."

"I am inviting you, you know, as a friend."

"Friend."

Suddenly, a green light began blinking irregularly, like it was some living creature.

"Did you manage to get school friends after that?"

"...what did you say?"

"May the blessing of the fairies continue to protect you even now."

"...wait, are you...?"

"I am RYOBO 203r. A cultural assistance machine that supports the life of people. You can choose colors from pearl white, light blue, and mint green."

And that was the very usual sales pitch of the robot.

An auditory hallucination, maybe that was what it was.

I sighed deeply.

There was no more need for inquisitiveness here.

"...well, go on and fulfill your duty. But should you find the fairies, make sure not to dispose of them, they are not some foreign substance, all right."

And then the robot again made its light flicker and,

"Of course, I am aware of that."

The Present

It appeared that I had fallen asleep sprawled on the desk.

The time was still before sunset.

I had a feeling that I had dreamed of my school life.

It happened recently, yet I could not avoid thinking it as an event from far in the past.

"...have I been crying while sleeping?"

It felt all dry around my eyes.

But I was no longer alone, I believed.

Fairies really existed, and I interacted with them on a daily basis.

These were days filled with happiness.

But, of course, the first thing that had bestowed me was the growth of my heart, I believed.

"Mh?"

There was still a rattling whisper deep in my ears.

It was much louder and more annoying than before.

Was there some garbage inside there?

I pointed my ears to the floor and tried smacking the side of my head but nothing came out.

Right then I realized that someone was knocking at the door.

"Yes, this is my home."

"What's that self-centered answer for."

"Hyh!"

I reflexively shut the door.

"Don't you do that. I just went on a long trip, you know... what's up? I even brought you that graduation album."

That worst friend of mine raided my room.

"So, after that, you remained behind at The School?"

I invited her into the room and we enjoyed the first conversation in a long while.

"Yeah. One thing led to another and I stayed behind. There were lots of documents, and there were teachers too, and you did hear about those UN cultural activities, right?"

"That thing about the Monument or whatever it was."

"And on that matter, right, I helped a little with compiling data. Just when I thought I'd get a job after graduation, it turned out to be a job at The School, what are you gonna do? No sentimentality nor anything there."

"My, really."

"Ah, right. I know it's late, but we finished the graduation album. I brought it."

"I thought I would never get it."

I received a thick album.

You know that it has been several months since graduation?

"By the way, they've had me compile that, too..."

"Bwah... having to do your own album..."

"But that life's over. I'm more or less done compiling data, so I'm joining up with the main unit over here."

"Huh, so you will be here?"

"There's lots of buildings that haven't aged away in the next village, so I guess I'll be there."

"When we parted we believed we would never meet again for the rest of our lives, this is incredible."

"Seriously," Y grinned and poked her own head. "So, what's with the head. You went and got a broomhead again."

"What, that is not true... I actually have them cut. They just grew shorter."

"The silhouette is one and the same, though. Now I'm getting nostalgic."

"...and I too was just remembering about that time."

"You heard the rumors about the girls?"

"Eh, whose?"

"What do you think the German girl and the others are doing right now? Well," conversations about memories always became lively. "...woah, look at the time. I gotta go greet your gramps before the day's out."

Y stood up and drank away the tea, then headed for the entrance.

"How hurried... my Grandfather would still be at the Office of Mediation. Do you know the place?"

"Yeah, I checked it out. I'm even borrowing a car."

"Aw, so nice."

I saw her off to the entrance, and saw that an automobile was most certainly parked so as to close up the side road.

"Do you know about robots?"

"Robots? Well, I did keep one company with one a little?"

"Kept company? Well, the one they used at the school broke down."

She brought out a nostalgic-looking cylindrical robot from the trunk of the car.

"Looks like his time was just up, but I want you to have a look, maybe you can fix him."

"The people who made this have gone away now. I will take care of him, but please do not expect much."

"I won't mind even if you can't fix him. It's not like I miss him. Well, I leave him to you."

She left, and I dragged the robot to my room.

I tried giving him a cursory check, but I could not even tell where he was damaged.

Robot technology was utterly outside of my field of expertise.

"Is there nothing to do but to have his own kind take care of him?"

To come in contact with his own kind would require many kinds of pains.

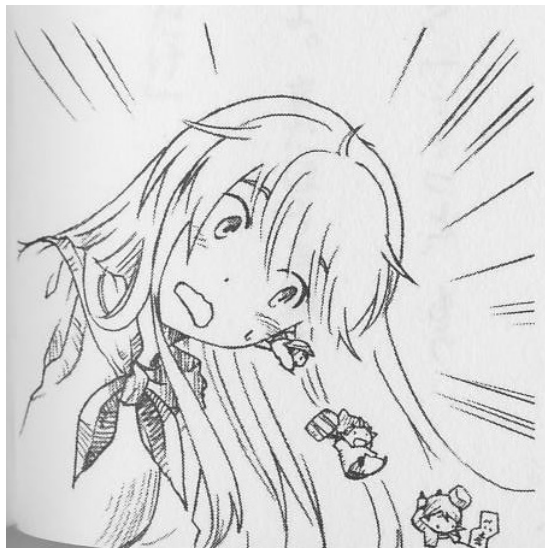
"Hummm, if only I had an instruction manual, at least..."

When I tilted my ears, I heard a strange sound like paper being crumpled, crumple-crumple-crumple-crumple!, echoing in them.

And then—

Bwoooooomp, it went.

Fairies spilled out from my ear hole.



"Y-, you guys?!"

"Here we are!" "We came back!" "Thanks, thanks!" "We had so much fun!"

It was the fairies who had left for a trip.

"Did you not say you were going to visit the city?"

As for them coming out of my ear, itself... well, at this point, it was no longer something special to be surprised about.

"All right, this was the neighborhood association trip!" "Was it nearby?" "It was refreshing!"

"We saw so many things, you know?"

They hopped all around me.

"...could it be, how to say it, that you have been doing something different from a normal trip?"

"Did we, now?" "What's normal?" "The opposite of abnormal!" "I don't get that!" "I don't have a

clue!" "Felt good, right."
I was the one who did not understand, is what I wanted to say.
"Us guys, when there's someone, we go meet them!"
"When there is someone?"
"As long as there's at least one."
Something quickly passed past my head, but I could not remember.
"...is... that so."
I was inexplicably agreeable.
There was no more need for understanding this matter, I decided.
After all, I also snuck a peek at my senpais' secrets, so we were square (?).
"It's a robot."
The fairies spotted the robot.
"I saw this before?" "It was where we traveled." "It's the real thing."
"I want to fix him, can you do it?"
The fairies swarmed the robot all at once.
Eventually a representative walked before me and,
"He is dead."
"Exactly, he is damaged."
"It's not," he made an X with his arms. "He met his death?"
"Are you saying he cannot be fixed?"
"If you want him fixed!" "We can do it, but!" "It won't go!" "Back to how it was?"
"How different, I wonder..."
"In the soul?" "The soul!" "Because the soul that you're talking about, master human!"
"Though you might not like it!" "It's reached its end!"
"..."
Mr. Robot used to charge towards the walls.
Suddenly, I connected the hidden rooms and the robot's odd behavior.
What did that solitary robot meet in those hidden passages?
Rustle, went the whisper of the angels.
This time I heard it not from my ear, but from the robot.
I removed the robot's cover and tried flipping over its contents.

And, bwhoom.

Fairies of all colors tumbled out.
"Eeek!" "There were more here!" "There were so many!" "It's our guys!"
They mingled with the fairies already there and I could no longer tell them apart.
"Job complete!"
One of the fairies jumped out of the window.
And some went into the mouse holes.
And some into the cracks in the floor.
They scattered about and ran away.
Chaos called chaos and a panic ran among the fairies.
The next thing I noticed was that the room had suddenly become audibly silent.
Not one fairy had remained behind.
All that remained was the wrecked robot, down on the floor. They were no longer inside him.
They were having a tea party inside his head, they were.

That night I had a dream.

I was just a child, still alone, but doing my best to not give in to loneliness.

But, actually, I was lonely.

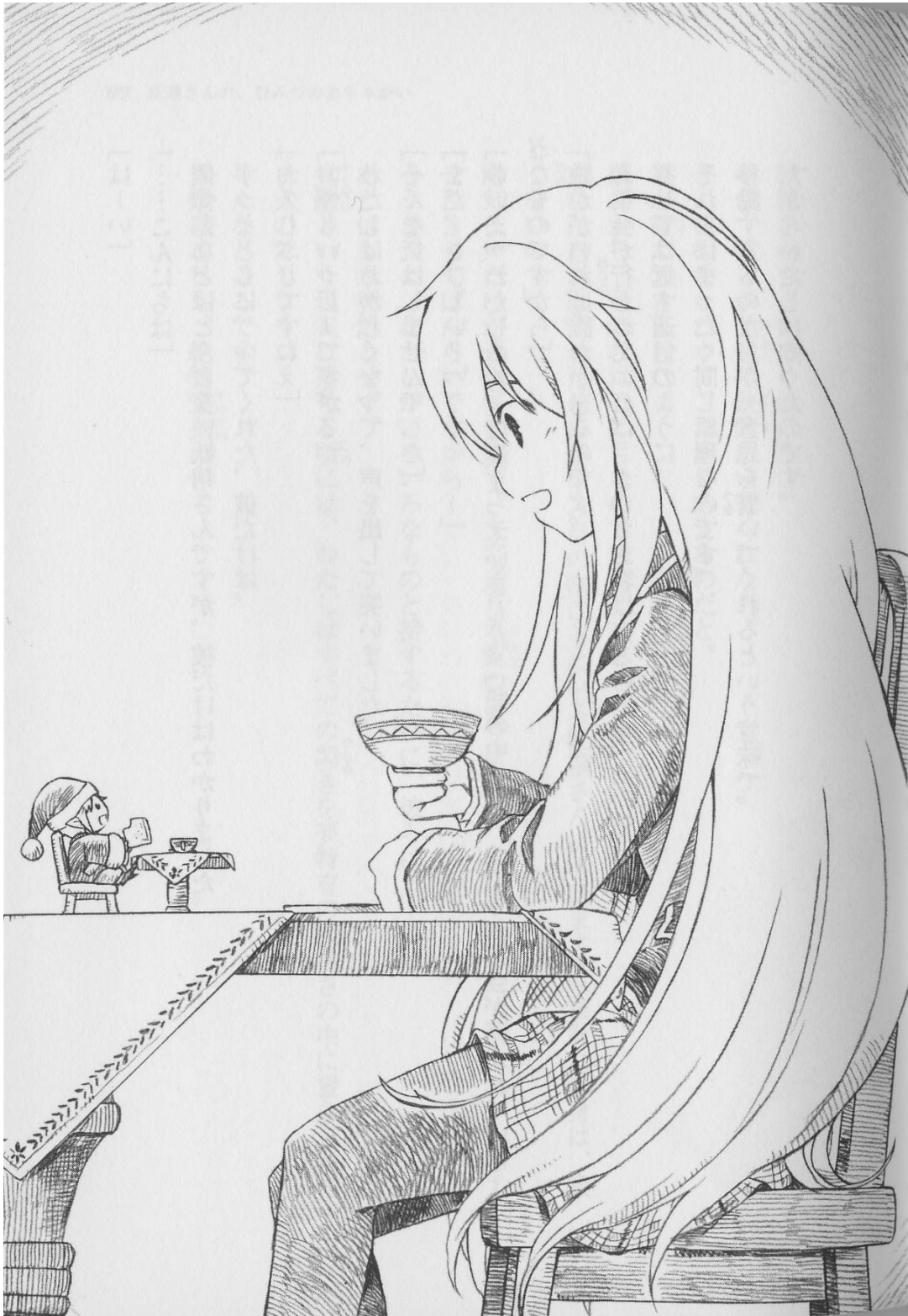
As I walked, I found a tiny round table with a cross in it, and on it were prepared a pot with tea, tea utensils, and tea sweets.

The table and the tea set were the ones we used at the tea parties when I was at school.

I took a seat.

When I did I found that there was a tiny table set for dolls set up there, and a fairy was sitting there.

It was the fairy from back then.



"Hiii!"

"...good day to you."

Fairies had nearly no distinctive features, but I could tell it was him.

He was the one who had been with me all along.

"It has been a long time."

"But we were always together?"

I felt strange, then I opened my mouth and laughed.

"It did not feel that way."

"Are you still lonely?"

"No," my answer was certain. "Now it feels like there can always be a tea party held inside my head."

As long as someone was there, someone would come.

As long as the tea party was held, guests would certainly come.

It was like communication, it was incoming and outgoing.

It had the exact same principle.

In the sense that those who moved would connect their wills.

And so I knew.

So long as fairies were there...

Right, so long as they were within the gaps of my memories,
then I would be able to achieve reciprocal understanding with whatever person.

My eyes misted up.

This was a dream, so those eyes were my mental eyes, however.

"And you yourself," I shouted at the fairy past my misty eyes. "You yourself, are you not lonely?"

Only a cheerful voice came back. It was literally like an echo.

"I got a flood of customers!"

Yes, I am sure, while I was searching for all those many things, they—

The rest was not distinct.

By the time I will fall into the reality that was waking up, every insight I will have had will lay within that indistinction typical of dreams and be forgotten.

Even on that day, humanity continued its much touted decline.

Fairy Memo - Pair Annihilation

There is a phenomenon called 'pair annihilation'.

The phenomenon consists of a massive release of energy when particles and anti-particles collide.

Back when this phenomenon of annihilation was completely under control, it was said to be one of the dream energies that allowed humanity to gain the skill of interstellar travel.

This has nothing whatsoever to do with that, but fairies are able to vanish within folklore and myth. This phenomenon is also a type of annihilation, isn't it?

Memories are also seen as a type of legend.

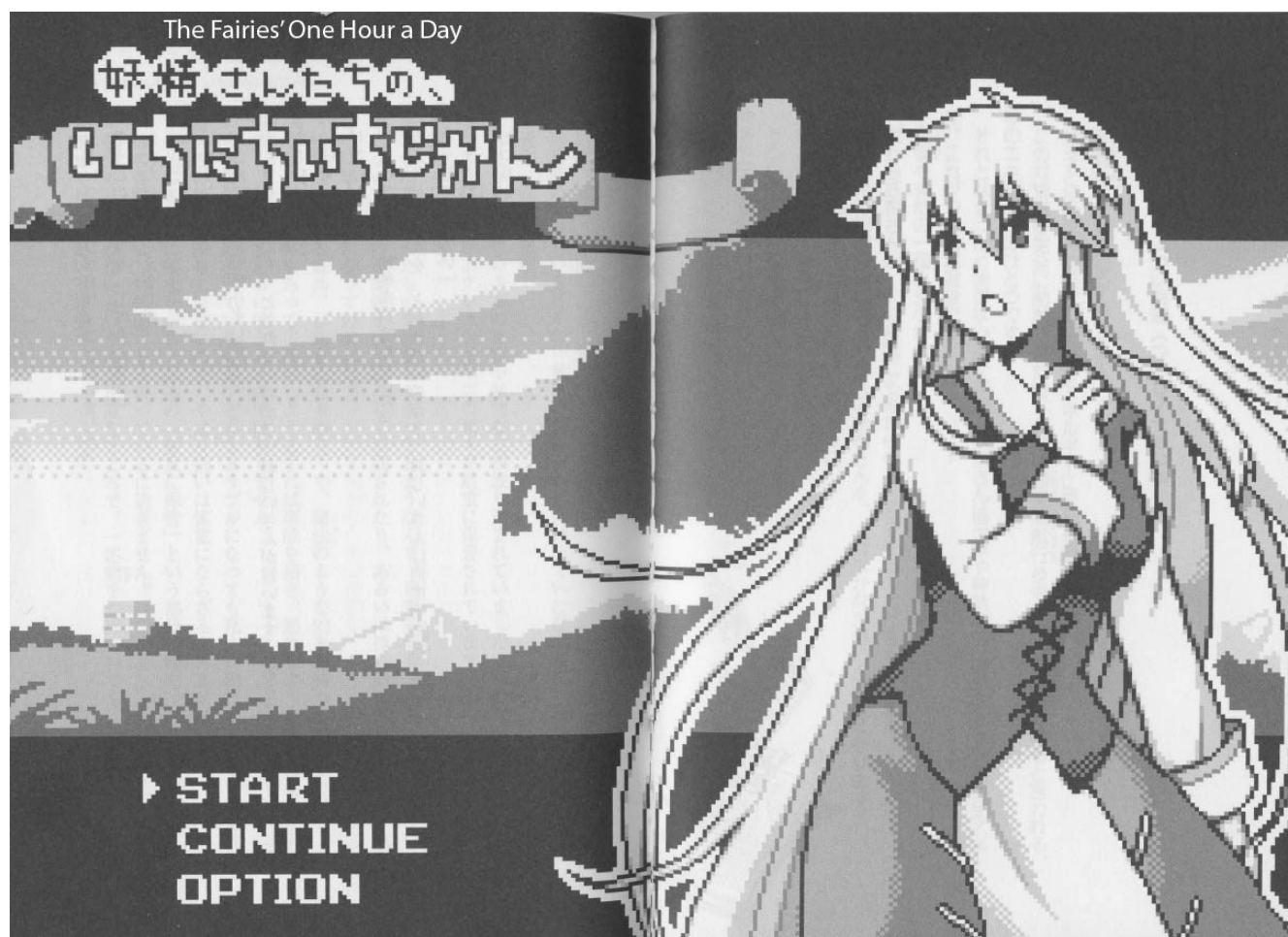
And so it's thinkable that fairies can live hidden in the consciousness of people.

The individual fairies that vanished like that, deep within the memories, can no longer be quite remembered by people.

Like trying to remember a lullaby heard during one's childish days, it becomes just a vague impression.

As things like those continue, folklore and myth may be born.





Grandfather said this with bleeps and bloops.

"GO CLEAN UP
THE WAREHOUSE."

AND I

REPLIED,

"NO."

Dling.

A sound effect came from somewhere.

"ARE YOU QUESTIONING
YOUR SUPERIOR?"

Grandfather said that.

"GO CLEAN UP
THE WAREHOUSE."

"NO."

Dling.

Again, a sound effect came from somewhere.

"ARE YOU QUESTIONING
YOUR SUPERIOR?"

Grandfather repeated that.

"GO CLEAN UP
THE WAREHOUSE."

"...YES."

Dling.

Among the rooms of the building where the Office was there was one that was used in the stead of a warehouse.

Nickname was, 4D Room.

Originally that was where Grandfather would chuck his documents and personal property, but right now it was where a good number of ultra-technological Secret Goods made by fairy hand were kept under strict storage.

Fairies were forgetful.

Abandoning what they had made and leaving was, seriously, a daily event with them.

Those kinds of things could cause problems, and so were recovered, or at times brought in by someone else, and next thing we noticed there was a massive number of them.

The tools made by the fairies were all ridiculous and all had magical-like effects.

They still had a thing or two going for them, but attempting to use them for good would invite accidents, and attempting to use them for evil would cause chaos, so they were not quite usable at all.

Perhaps there was a safety device inside, as no matter what trouble they cause no deaths occurred, but material damage would not end at that, so it was of course unavoidable that prudence would be required in their use.

And so, and this was truly regrettable, the 'kept under strict storage' expression I used before was in fact a lie.

We were only saying that publicly in formal documents and the like, nothing more.

It was a truth that there was no possible way of guarding them, so even if we did lock it, those who wished to steal could steal, that was the situation.

Lately, due to involvement with the People Monument Project spearheaded by the UN,

instances of people coming and going from outside the Village had increased dramatically. As among those most were connected to the UN, we had to revise our sloppy management system before it was identified as poor, that was how things went.

The staff consisted of me and Assistant-san.

As we opened the door with a sound effect and charged into the room, and gasped as we found that there were wooden boxes big and small scattered everywhere with nearly no place to step in.

"THIS IS A SERIOUS
MESS. . .

WE MUST SPLIT UP
AND CLEAN UP
ALL THESE TOOLS."

Three hours later, at break time, we were lost in thought as we drank our teas.

That was because, no matter how long our work continued, there was no sign that the room would be put back in order.

We could not tell what the near totality of tools were for.

We had nothing like a list of tools that we had taken custody of, however the ones that came from before I took up my post were buried in the mass of documents in a different storage room.

With things like that, though we called it cleaning up, all we did was move boxes and set them side by side. It was still a hard job, however.

The boxes had been moved without care, and as a result they blocked the passage, and we were no longer able to change the situation beyond that.

"WE ARE TRAPPED..."

I made bleeping-blooming sound effects I did not quite understand as I muttered to myself. By the way, that sound came out every time we spoke.

"IT LOOKS LIKE WE
NEED TO THINK
ABOUT HOW TO
DO THIS A LITTLE
BIT FURTHER."

Prostrate on the table, Assistant-san lifted his head and shook it side to side.

Exactly.

The warehouse was now filled to the brim, we could no longer make changes, we could no longer move things in this situation.

"...THIS IS
STRANGE."

I tried opening the door that led to the warehouse without any real reason to, and my eyes turned into dots (though my eyes had been dots to begin with).

I entered the room, looked right, looked left,

"HUH? IT WENT BACK
TO HOW IT WAS
BEFORE WE MOVED
THINGS..."

The location of things had reset to the initial position.

"THEN WE CAN RETRY
THIS AS MANY TIMES

AS WE LIKE."

We resumed our work once more.

However, no matter how many times we did it, we could not put the warehouse in a proper state. The difficulty level was too high.

"IF ONLY WE COULD
PULL THEM, IT WOULD
BE SO MUCH EASIER..."

Though we could push the boxes, we could not pull them.

No matter how tiny and light the box, we could only push.

Why, you ask, but it was because that was the rule.

We worked hard and three hours later we finally managed to finish putting things in order.

"SIGH... WE HAVE
FINISHED AT LAST."

Having grown exhausted, the two of us moved to the office.

"AH! I FORGOT
SOMETHING."

I returned to the warehouse and,

"HUH?"

Because we had gone in and out, everything had returned to how it was in the beginning.

"...THIS IS TOTALLY
A BUG."

We could not win at this at all.

We did remember how to do this, so we could clear this as many times as we wanted.

But since it went back every time we went in and out, there was no point in cleaning up.

There was a simple crane drawn on the sketchbook that Assistant-san stood up on his desk.

"I WISH WE HAD
SOMETHING LIKE
THAT..."

I thought that actually smashing the wall and having a crane carry away the boxes would be seriously faster, indeed.

The warehouse had become a cursed room...

I went to brew some more tea and stood before the kettle.

Then I opened the command window in the air, and from the commands in there such as 'Leave', 'Examine', 'Take', and 'Attack' I picked 'Take'.

The command group changed, and from 'Kettle', 'Cup', and 'Plate' I picked 'Kettle'.

I brewed tea with the boiling water, returned to the table with Assistant-san, and the two of us slacked off.

Now then, in what way shall we clean up the warehouse?

We sluggishly thought with muddled brains, but it ended in nothing.

This was not sweet enough.

I was going to pick 'Look', 'Table', 'Sweets' from the menu, but made a mistake and ended up picking 'Look', 'Table', 'Assistant-san'.

ASSISTANT-SAN
IS FEELING
SLUGGISH.

Whopsie, how bad, how bad. Let us redo it.
'Look, 'Table', 'Assistant-san'... wait, I made a mistake again.
I was impatient and my hand felt like it was slipping.

ASSISTANT-SAN...
NOTICED YOUR
GAZE AND SMILED
A LITTLE.

The message had changed.
By choosing the same action several times flags got set and what unfolded could change.
Right then, I heard a sound effect of the door being knocked on. It looked like an event had started... no it had not, it looked like we had a guest.
I took a breath and chose 'Move', 'Front of the door', 'Investigate', 'Door', and welcome the guest.

"WELCOME.
HOW MAY WE
ASSIST YOU?"

Standing there was a little girl hidden in robes all the way to the head.
There was about one head of difference in height between us two.
The girl entered in the Office without a word.

"UHM,
WHO MIGHT YOU
BE?"

The girl had reached about halfway through the room, and ignoring me, she was about to go all the way to the warehouse.

"PLEASE WAIT,
IT IS DANGEROUS
IN THERE, YOU
KNOW?"

"MOVE OFF!"

I was shoved off.

"WHAT ARE
DOING?"

"YOU WILL LET ME
SEIZE WHAT IS
INSIDE THE ROOM
IN THE BACK."

"THE FAIRIES' TOOLS...?"

I stopped her with a hand on her shoulder as she was briskly walking towards the warehouse, but I was swiped off.

"RELEASE ME! YOU
COMMONER!"

"C-, COMMONER...!"

Commoner ①a normal person ②someone with no official rank

I had a whispered conversation with Assistant-san.

And then, as representative, I asked.

"ARE YOU AN
ARISTOCRAT?"

"NO, YOU ARE
MISTAKEN."

However, the little girl pushed out her chest in pride.

"I AM MUCH MORE
IMPORTANT."

More important than an aristocrat.

That would be...

"W-, WHAT SORT OF
PERSON WOULD BE
THAT IMPORTANT?"

"I HAVE NO REASON
TO EXPLAIN THAT
TO YOU."

The girl was trying to force her way into the warehouse.

As I restrained her, her hood flew backwards and her bare face got exposed.

"..."

Chestnut hair pulled into a bun, two horizontal lines of cutesy eyes drawn with a number of pixels, and neither nose nor mouth were drawn. And a very average physique with a two-body-to-one-head ratio.

The colors, including the clothes she was wearing and her skin, were limited to three.

An extremely ordinary 16x16 pixel girl. Same as us.

She was maybe a pretty girl.

She certainly felt womanly.

"REGARDLESS
THIS IS A
PROBLEM."

I stood in the way of the entrance to the warehouse.

"THIS IS UNDER UN
JURISDICTION, IF YOU
ABSOLUTELY NEED TO
COME HERE, PLEASE
MAKE AN APPOINTMENT."



"I SEE... SO YOU ARE
JUST GOING TO STAND
IN MY WAY."

The girl wore her hood and hid her face.

"YOU WILL REGRET
THIS LATER!"

Bwooom, the girl went out at a run.

"NOW JUST WHAT WAS
ALL THAT ABOUT..."

I came to learn that several days later.

An attitude of eating even food that been picked up was fundamental for people at present.
And that was why berries, and even mushrooms, were considered to be important ingredients.

On days without work, I also contributed in securing the worth of my food.

I was walking on in a field drawn in square blocks, accompanied by a cheerful music.

I went past the plains and entered the woods.

Mushrooms occasionally grew there, so I keen-eyedly harvested them.

However, they might be poisonous mushrooms.

The graphics for the mushrooms were all the same, so I could not tell whether they were chanterelles or king trumpets.

I tried investigating using my Appraise skill.

SHIITAKE!

What a relief, this was edible.

In my neighborhood, as long as it was freshly harvested, it could also be eaten raw.

"DELICIOUS!"

A flavor that nearly made me want more.

A lively sound effect resounded from somewhere.

I advanced down the path as I picked the shiitakes.

In the woods there were stone walls set up like in a maze.

They were the remnants of a former town, of course.

Just like it was in a majority of the lands on Earth, at present they had been swallowed by the woods.

Many berries had fallen in the maze.

The berries were represented by a single pixel.

As I walked down the path, I collected the dots.

And as I did, every once in a while I was attacked by a ghost.

Because being touched by a ghost meant OUT, I could only run away.

I carefully studied the moment when the ghost would not be there and returned to gathering the food.

Did you know? Ghosts are actually edible.

When you eat the huge feed that occasionally drops, for a short time you become able to eat ghosts raw.

Three I had raw, one I cut his belly open with a knife, took out his organs, grilled with salt, and ate.

Things were going well and I was on the verge of catching a fifth, but the effect of the food ran out and things looked really bad for me, I had my fill of the true law of the jungle.

Of course I did not forget to gather berries.

They were a precious food to get through Winter.

"AH, WAIT! DO NOT

RUN AWAY!"

One of the pixels hopped away like a flea.

What incredibly three-dimensional motions it was capable of... bad boy.

I of course caught it and stuffed it in my pocket.

And as I was picking up berries and eating ghosts, the sound effect of a fanfare played out.

The power within myself had increased.

I called out the parameter screen to check it out and found that my STR had increased by 2, my AGI by 1, my HP by 7.

And so my skills were,

Neutral - Apprentice Scholar (BIS)

Level: 2

STR: 6

AGI: 4

WIS: 12

HP: 22 (X)

AC: 7

♀ x 3

MAGE 0/0/0/0/0/0/0

PRST 0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Neutral was my alignment.

There were three possibilities, good / bad / neutral.

It appeared I was neither a good nor a bad person... wait, huh? I was not... a good person...?

Scholar was my job.

Scholars could appraise items, meaning they were able to turn knowledge into strength, however they had the demerit of having a growth twice as slow as other people. What... my growth... was slow?

I had no idea what BIS meant.

As cross marks accumulated, they were displayed on the HP.

Now what was AC again...?

Humans often said things such as *"I know my body better than anyone! I beg you sensei, this is literally just for this time, the request of a lifetime. I want to have my last instant on a tatami mat..."*, but it was a delusion.

The moment they returned home even cancer got cured, for some reason, and it even happened that they lived nearly twenty more years.

And similarly, this was full of things that I did not understand.

I examined my equipment status.

1) KNIFE (folding type)

2) ROBES (cloth)

It appeared that the correct information was displayed.
It seemed I could change settings in the submenu's config screen.
By the way, at present it looked like this.

GFX level: LO ■□□□□□ HI
Absurdity: LO □□□□□■ HI
Physics calculation: automatic
Genre: full genre

There were many more specific headings.
"WHAT IS THIS...?"
I had a feeling like everything was weird.
But even thinking, I could still not quite understand.
On the way back home I apparently went the wrong way, as I hit on a massive tear in the ground.
But something of this size I could just leap over.
I dashed. And on the edge of the cliff I jumped!
I successfully made a spectacular flying hop to to the opposite cliff.
It was a distance of about ten meters.

"..."
As I said, it was odd.
But no matter how much I thought, I understood nothing at all.
I had this feeling like the data units that the central processing unit that was my brain used had dropped down to around 8 bits. Bleep-bloop.

When I returned to the Office I found things were very bad (I climbed the wall, so I entered the third floor Office directly from the window).

"WAH... WHAT A SHOCK!"

"WOAH, HEY, WHERE
DID YOU COME FROM..."

"GRANDFATHER! WHAT
HAPPENED HERE?"

The Office was full of people.

They numbered ten.

The Office was not that cramped, but they were enough that there was no space either.

Worse, the residents were drawn in 16x16 pixels, same as us.

These things drawn 16x16 were called tiles.

They were convenient when having to draw things that moved a lot, but tiles were background data and the limit was that no more than a maximum of sixteen could be displayed simultaneously.

That was not the only limit, the specs said that no more than four could be used in a single row.

Which specs, you ask?

But the world's, of course. They were the specs of this blue and beautiful Earth.

Grandfather, Assistant-san, and I also had similar looks, so we needed to be careful about the data distribution.

However, at present, there were far more than sixteen people crammed into the room.

When a massive amount of data was forcibly displayed at once, drawing priorities swapped at high speeds, and it was possible to place more tiles than normal.

In those instances, it was unavoidable that flickering would occur.

And right at that moment, that was the situation we had.

Normally, drawing priorities were strictly controlled, but now they fluctuated responding to the emotions of individual people, or to say it, people were stealing them from each other.

"THERE IS A PROBLEM
IN THE VILLAGE."

"A PROBLEM?"

The representative of the residents here was flickering intensely as he took one step forwards.

"JUST WHAT THE HELL
IS ALL THIS ABOUT!"

Because of an anger strong enough to drag the drawing priority to him, the residents' representative was displayed clearly.

"P-, PLEASE CALM
DOWN..."

"LIKE I COULD BE CALM
ABOUT THIS!"

He blew his top.

His anger was so extreme that, for an instant, his pixel tiles turned to a more realistic 32x32 (graphics became reality!)

"COULD YOU TELL ME
THE SITUATION?"

"THE HOUSES ARE
DISAPPEARING!"

According to what the representative said, things went like this.

At present, many people had come to the Village.

To allow the UN-related personnel and the workers that they employed to live here, empty houses were being renovated at a fast rate, but something strange had occurred and work could no longer continue, to quote.

That strange event was that the buildings under renovation were disappearing as if sucked in by the land... that was the paranormal phenomenon they said they were experiencing.

"DISAPPEARING?"

"WE LEFT FOR ONE NIGHT
AFTER FINISHING WORK
AND..."

The representative hopped upwards.

"ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS
A ROOFTOP~!"

"I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU
ARE SO ANGRY."

"...NO, I AM NOT REALLY
ANGRY WITH YOU."

The representative slumped his shoulders in despondency.

"IT'S JUST, WHO DO WE

TALK TO ABOUT THIS...

WE DON'T KNOW!"

"YOU'RE A SCHOLAR, RIGHT?"

"LEND US YOUR WISDOM!"

"IF MORE HOUSES DISAPPEAR

AS WE TRY TO FIX THEM, IT

WILL BE A PROBLEM!"

"JUST WHEN WE WERE FINALLY

INVITED TO WORK FOR THE UN!"

It felt like very adult-like statements were mixed in there...

Grandfather said this.

"...AND THAT WAS THE REASON...

WHY YOU FOUGHT."

"THAT WAS WHY, WHEN I CLIMBED

THE WALL, I WORE A FLOWERPOT

ON MY HEAD..."

"WHAT THE HELL DID YOU SAY YOU
DID?"

"I DID THINK IT WAS CRAZY..."

Now just why did I go and do that.

"BESIDES, IT WAS YOU!"

"WHAT DID YOU SAY!"

"THAT THE ONE WHO STARTED

THIS WAS YOU!"

"WHAT, YOU MAKING FUN OF ME!"

"OI, OFF WITH THE HANDS!"

As people began quarreling, the display began flickering even more intensely.

To the point that it hurt my eyes.

If I did not do something, children could get seizures.

"GUYS, CALM DOWN!"

I said that quickly, which beeped at a high pitch.

"ANYWAY, STOP STANDING SIDE

BY SIDE! SCATTER UP ALTERNATED,

LIKE IN OTHELLO!"

With the image of skipping one box like in Othello in mind, we stood alternately.

Things had calmed down more or less, but there was still a little bit of flickering.

"THE OFFICE'S RULES ARE GOING

TO BE CONTRAVENED! ...WHAT DO

WE DO?"

Assistant-san approached.

He covertly offered something to me.

...it was a mysterious laser gun.

"WHAT DO I DO! WHAT DO I DO

WITH THIS!"

Assistant-san stood his sketchbook like a flip book.

His proposal had been made into a schematic.

Too many tiles! → shoot Sexy Beam! → C L E A R !

"THAT WOULD BE
M U R D E R !"

For just an instant my graphics turned into a hyperrealistic face (an exotic, Western-looking girl as drawn in comic strips) and I tore the sketchbook apart.

It would be a serious problem if people saw this.

Assistant-san would come to be regarded as a person who could not distinguish reality from games and the Internet.

"THAT IS NOT 'CLEAR',
THAT WOULD BE
KILLING PEOPLE!"

Huh, and Assistant-san slumped his shoulders (very skillfully, given they were few pixels).

"AWWW, THIS WORRIES
ME..."

And as we were doing that, the people again began quarreling.

"I CAN'T STAND THIS
ANYMORE!"

"YOU WANNA DO THIS!"

"I'M GONNA DO THIS!"

"BESIDES, I'VE NEVER
LIKED YOUR FACE!"

"SERIOUSLY, PEOPLE...
STOP THIS!"

No one had ears with which to hear.

Fists howled, and the scene turned into a violent quarrel.

Red pixels (blood) scattered everywhere, it was a gruesome scene of item destruction.

"AWWWWW..."

I staggered and clung to the wall.

As I did, I quickly opened the menu on the bounce.

GFX level: LO ■□□□□□ HI

Absurdity: LO □□□□□■ HI

Physics calculation: automatic

Genre: full genre

In an instant's flash of inspiration, an epiphany dawned on my 8-bit brain.

"RIGHT. IF I DO THIS...!"

GFX level: LO □■□□□□ HI

I grabbed the slider located at the tip of the bar with my fingers and dragged it hard to the side.

Though I put quite the strength into it, the slider did not move past one slot.

It appeared that my STR parameter was insufficient.

But at least one should still make things change.

As long as my instinct was right.

I closed the config menu and the world changed.

The people who until then had been 16x16 pixels now turned around 78x64 pixels.

This was a significant change.

A rapid advance towards the next generation.

In one word, 'Super'.

Head-to-body ratio went to three. Also, it seems that faces and clothes were now displayable in detail, so the villagers who were identical in shape and only differed in color disappeared.

The crowd of uninvited visitors each had their own personality, I see.

Also, there was a dramatic change in the background.

What until then was a top-down view (with the viewpoint being right above) advanced to an isometric view (with the viewpoint at a tilted angle).

The variations in height, not just the width and length, came to be distinguishable by sight.

"Oi, don't it feel like you can actually use your tongue fluently now?" "Yeah, and that bleeping sound effect that played every time you spoke's also gone." "Say, you know that every time you speak you got your face graphics next to your words?" "You too!" "So that's the face you had!" "Dammit, I got a square jaw, the way things were before hid my flaws!"

It was a good thing that graphics had improved, but I had a feeling that next time the working of my brains would get a little heavier.

A message bleeped into my head.

Your INT is at present 12. You cannot process things fully like this. 1 INT = 1 bit. The present settings are recommended for an operation environment with INT 16 or above. If operation becomes sluggish, please lower the GFX level.

"I got told I am an idiot using roundabout technical words!"

Though movement became somewhat sluggish, I decided I would never ever lower the graphical level.

"People, please, avoid moving and causing overloads as much as possible, speak standing still. I am willing to hear all the particulars of the matter."

"...c'mon, don't say things that are so complicated, miss apprentice."

"So... this is where the phenomenon of building disappearance has occurred."

I went to the Village on my own to see how things were.

As I had heard, several residences had seemingly collapsed on themselves, and the position of their roofs had gone down.

Among them there were houses that had become nothing but roofs.

It did not look like they had sunk into the ground.

The very building materials had vanished from the bottom. And it was due to some kind of power.

"This is so nonsensical that it must be..."

A prank by the fairies?

Now that I said it, today I was still yet to meet a fairy.

"And one and two and here I am!"

One fairy showed his face from my pocket.

Though humans had a three heads to body ratio, the fairy was still around 16x16 pixels.

Well, I suppose it was a question of contrast...

By the way, fairies seemed more than capable of expression even at 16x16.

He was not that different from the norm.

"W-, when did you get in there?"

"We're fairies, we're pixies. Anywhere's fine?"

The fairy uttered a line that felt like it came from a template.

"Well, that is fine, but... was all this done by you people? This is a bit of a problem. If you caused problems to people with no guilt to them I will give you the mumble-mumbles."

"Mumble-mumbles..." the fairy started shivering. "Should I get excited about that?"

"I wish you did not."

"So haaard!"

"If you want to be bullied, then fine. Now, what do you dislike?"

"...being ignored?"

"Then if you annoy people the penalty will be ostracization."

"So meeean!"

"Then please tell me. What is the cause of this?"

"Who knows!"

The fairy spun his head all the way around (what?).

"And he went and said 'who knows'..."

"I have zero ideas about it!"

"So this is not the doing of you fairies?"

The fairy left my pocket with a hop, made a lap of the destroyed house, then returned.

"There's the smell of nonsense!"

"You are the one to say it..."

"But, maybe, it was far in the past."

"In the past?"

"Us from the past?"

It was the doing of past fairies.

"And so... what kind of situation would lead to something like this?"

"Who knows, I'm hurtin' for understanding!"

"...are you, now."

This was the doing of the fairies, it was no mistake.

However, it was thinkable that it was not caused by the present fairies, it was an ancient mechanism that had suddenly activated.

Still... I did not understand.

I had the feeling that my normal self would understand.

But since I only had an INT of no more than 12, my head was hazy, my brain wandered here and it wandered there... that was how I felt.

From on ahead I heard a commotion among the people.

"That construction site... it seems something happened to it. We go! Come on, hide."

"Aye!"

The fairy skillfully jumped into the pocket as I began running.

"Ah, you're from Sensei's..."

The workers called me over with troubled faces.

"What happened to this building?"

There was a brickwork house just built there.

It used to be a house, I suppose I should have said.

It was just in the course of collapsing right at the point it had been built.

"Well, you see we just barely finished, and... soon s'we did, the bricks suddenly began

disappearing."

Another worker said this.

"And it ain't just here. Nearly the same stuff happened earlier at the renovation site over there."

Promptly, reports came in succession, "it also happened yesterday," "I also saw that the day before last".

It seemed the case of the disappearing buildings was with no exaggeration a reality.

The destruction seemed to be starting from below, in other words it was sequential beginning with the brick staircase near the ground. Houses did not disappear one per instant, and at times it happened that the vanishing came to a stop.

But, once some time passed, there was a pleasant sound effect of disappearance and the building lowered in height as if whittled away...

The disappearance could be seen well in the isometric view.

If this had been 2D it would have been hard to grasp that, unless it was a side view.

"I wish I could investigate things a little further, however..."

"This thing here's dangerous. We even had a roof tilt over and collapse, it depends on how the vanishing happens. And if we get you hurt, young lady, Sensei is gonna hurt us."

"...Grandfather is on in his years, you know? That would not happen."

"Well, it's just that Sensei owns a lot of ancient weapons."

"What?"

This was the first time I had heard of that.

"He's got swords and bows and arrows and guns and all kinds. They're valuable as antiques, I hear, but since they're vulnerable to humidity and direct sunlight, we were made to work on a secure storage location."

"That was one serious problem, I must say."

Grandfather pushing around all these buff men... he was far too much the big shot.

"So that is what he is doing..."

"Even a tank that Sensei drove around is stored in that armory."

"An armory!"

That sounded dangerous.

"Even that armory has to be collapsing, right now."

"No, the thing's underground. It's a solid one. It's surrounded by ancient materials that don't rust, not by bricks or wood like these."

"Bwaaah..."

"Well, it's Sensei's job, what else. If it's for research there's nothing to be done, that's how things go."

That was most certainly a hobby of his, that I could be certain about.

Even as we spoke the destruction continued, and in the end, besides a rooftop alone sticking to the ground, absolutely everything had gone.

"...it is like the air was let out of it."

"I just don't know what to do 'bout all of this... and people were scheduled to move in next week. We ain't making it in time."

"But at this point, it is better to not rebuild anything, I would say."

"I guess so. If we did it now it'd collapse again, it'd be a waste of bricks."

Now then, how was I to investigate this?

If this was devised by fairies of times past, then off somewhere there should be a tool that served as origin point, or a massive gathering of fairies...

I decided to have the workers rest and walk about the Village as I sorted through my ideas.

"Hummm..."

"Hey, hey, Young Sensei, come listen for a moment. We have a problem!"

I soon bumped into one of the older ladies of the Village.

"Did your house also collapse?"

The face graphics of the old lady, drawn with a charming touch, said this.

"My house is fine. But there's other things that are vanishing."

"Other things?"

I went to the old lady's house and she brought two bottles from a shelf.

The two bottles were kept separate, each on their own shelf.

Both of them looked full of gummy candies of all colors, but...

"When I put them together, something strange happens. I'm going to show you."

The old lady deliberately put the two bottles next to each other.

When the two bottles were next to each other, suddenly, the gummies inside began wriggling all jelly-like.

"Creepy..."

The gummies were shaking vigorously and intermittently, and though crammed tight in the bottles, they exchanged places as they vibrated.

However, the mysterious phenomenon did not end at that.

"Here, it's starting... look."

It happened in the left bottle, when a number of gummies of the same color fell in a row.

"The gummies... they disappeared?"

"And, see, when the gummies disappear from one bottle, they appear in the opposite bottle as transparent."

"That is true..."

Gummies transferred from bottle to bottle, and when they lost their color, is that what is happening?

"Well, Young Sensei, do you know what this is about?"

"I do not quite understand... still, they are like insects and it is sort of difficult to deal with this here."

"That's right. My daughter's also scared and won't eat any."

"And the only way to stop this is to keep the bottles away?"

"No, if I carefully add gummies and fill the bottle near to the top, no more reactions occur."

The old lady said that with a high-score face.

"Most importantly, there's a trick to it. You gotta do it with some skill. Since the gummies you put in react and disappear in a chain. Listen here, the trick to chain is to line up three gummies of the same color in a row..."

I was being talked about tips and tricks (and wondering what would be the meaning of it all).

"These transparent gummies... I wonder what flavor they are."

"...so you're curious too?"

I stared fixedly at the old lady.

"Did you eat them? These squirming gummies?"

"...yeah, I ate them. This little belly of mine was just empty."

An odd sense of tension made me swallow hard.

"And so... the flavor?"

"...the flavor..."

The old lady began shivering.

"I'll bring you some tea. Whatever else, I still have that."

"Flavor tasting!"

The fairy landed on the table.

"Ah, hey, you are going to be spotted!"

With sweets before him, the fairy did not do as told.

He said this with a creepy smile that had a shadow to it.

"...sometimes, we're prisoners of our desires?"

"That would be always."

"I'm having this!"

The fairy jumped inside the bottle and ate one of the transparent gummies.

"How is it, how is the flavor?"

"...it tasted transparent."

I also tried eating one, and it had no flavor whatsoever.

To put it clearly, it was not tasty.

"It is like a mere clump of gelatin."

"Dejectedly dejected..."

It appeared that fairies felt dejected when they ate sweets that were not tasty.

He slipped inside my pocket with a feeble gait and rounded up like a cat.

I decided to investigate the gummies that I had brought back.

Grandfather's microscope was small but very powerful.

It not only allowed microscopy, it was even equipped with simple analysis functionalities.

Being a product born of the last periods of human science, it had powers of clairvoyance that allowed seeing whether something was true or false, for example.

In their last period, even humanity had managed to craft technologies that were like magic, indeed.

"Well, I'm not gonna let you just analyze some gummies."

The microscope was one of Grandfather's Most-Precious Items, and I was not allowed to touch it.

"When I get a spare I'll let you touch it."

"Thinking like a collector, are we..."

Creating specimens was the pupil's job.

I cut out the gummies' cells and spread them on the petri dish like butter.

"Done."

"Mh-hm. Now then, let's look and see how far the fairy prank is going."

"...I am only half-amused."

"Ngh, this is amazing, you know."

As uncommon, Grandfather groaned.

"Have a look."

"But this..."

The gummy cell I saw past the lens was moving around vigorously.

Worse, that was not the only thing...

"...whaaaaaat, but what is this?"

"What're gummies made of? Agar?"

"No, gelatin. They have sugar and fruit juice and the like added, however."

"Then they're proteins. You know about proteins?"

"They are the most important compounds among those that make up the human body."

"Try giving us a briefing, it's fine if it's simple."

"Well..."

I mobilized all the information I knew and concisely explained.

More importantly, I expected that these would all be things that Grandfather knew, however.

Proteins were the fundamental components (macromolecular compounds) of living beings.

For example, humans, from the skin, the muscles, the enzymes and all the way to everything else, were made by proteins.

The components of proteins were basically twelve types of aminoacids.

They were something like the proteins' fundamental components.

Depending on the combination they became massive, three-dimensional compounds, that was what proteins were.

However, they did more than just grow huge and drift away.

They had functionalities according to their forms.

As long as proteins and their diverse functionalities were active, circulation of blood within the body was preserved, the brain remained active, metabolism occurred, and digestion was possible.

Do you know about nanomachines?

Being super small robots, they could carry out medical procedures and the like inside the body.

Proteins were also something similar.

"Well done. Well, you can leave it at that."

"Still, I have a feeling that these are a little different from proteins...?"

As proteins were exceedingly small, they could not be seen with the naked eye.

A powerful microscope was necessary.

It was no good to just enlarge them with a lens, it was required to use electronic means to read structural information and output it to a screen.

Electronics were somewhat troublesome, so devices that used them turned out large.

Without scientific clairvoyance functionalities, keeping microscopes with high analysis functionality to these normal sizes was impossible, or so it seemed.

Fairies were amazing, but humans were also decently remarkable.

"So, what is going on with this gummy?"

Unlike the proteins we knew, the enlarge gummy was composed of what seemed to be square colored tiles linked together in countless numbers.

They were so flat, and, how to say it, I am now hesitant to use these words, but..... they were pixel-like.

"I'm saying they're either macromolecular compounds or something of the same type, no mistake there, I think."

"But I have never seen anything like it."

"Still, see, even your face..."

"W-, what is going on with my face?"

"Your contours are oddly choppy, and your jaggedness stands out."

"You meanie!"

"You don't have anything to remove the jaggedness... you have no anti-aliasing applied, I guess."

"That wounds me!"

"Say you, it could be possible that you're the only one with coarse pixels, couldn't you?"

"That is not true! I am just lacking in WIS a little bit! And so the roughness of my image stands out..."

"That's no good."

I grasped my face.

"The memory allocation... the high-speed calculations... the burden on the processor..."

"You don't make any daily effort to gain experience and that's how it ends."

"I have had all sort of experiences since I returned to the Village, but being level 2 even I cannot accept."

"No, that much experience would make you around that level, I'd say."

"Life is so bitter..."

It would take a lifetime to get to level 4 or 5, that was what this world was.

"A-, anyway, right now we have the gummies to think about."

Tiny compounds made of pixels were moving about vigorously on their own.

These would have to be the motive power for the gummies' motions.

"...but are they really just gummies, I wonder, these are weird."

"No, I'd say they're not."

Grandfather said that seriously.

"It's conclusively unlikely they're just that."

I had a feeling like there was a dark cloud hanging behind him.

"W-, well then," I felt my throat dry as I asked this. "Are they different creatures?"

"There's a simple way to find out."

"W-, what is it..."

Grandfather's eyes opened wide all *gwah!* like a mad scientist's.

"We should just examine human cells!"

Bwaaah.

It was like, suddenly, a scalpel was stuck into the part I wanted to avert my eyes from the most.

And then—

"OwChChCh..."

Cells were fine no matter where they came from, but they were harvested from my tongue moving oh so lively.

Cells were harvested using something like a hole-punch machine, so it stung.

Grandfather nimbly made a specimen from the sample and placed in the microscope.

"...now this is stimulating."

He pointed with his chin for me to look as well.

Past the microscope's lens there spread an even more nonsensical world than the one before.

"The body is a microcosm of wonders!"

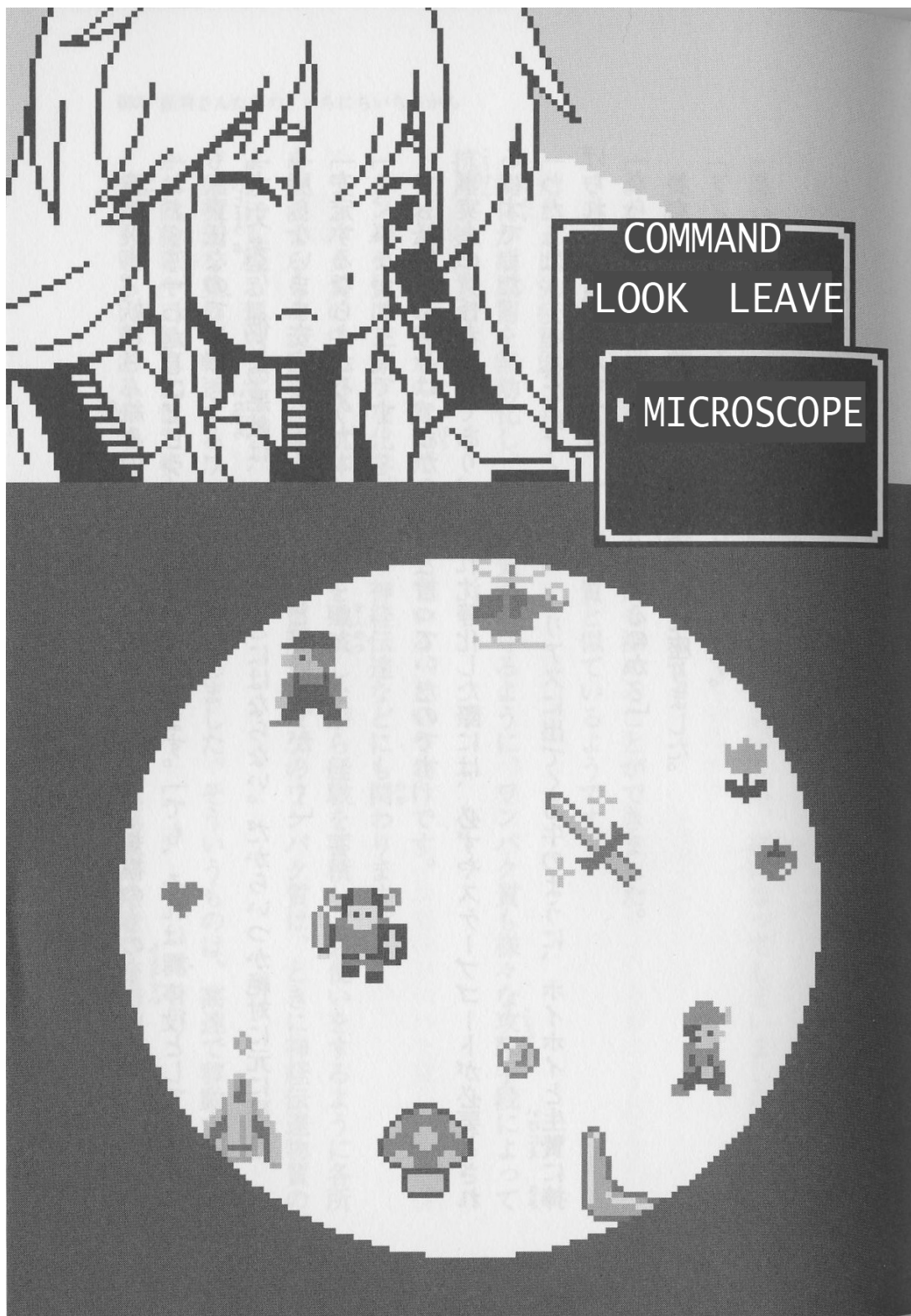
A scientifically enlightening BGM (synthesizer) began playing from nowhere in particular.

One of the compounds, by what may be coincidence, had the appearance of super-deformed plumber.

Another one, by coincidence or by prank, wore a helmet and looked like an explorer.

And yet another one had a sword and appeared to be a hero. Of course, I thought them coincidences.

There were things like spacecrafts and helicopters.



Swords and boomerangs, hearts and coins, things that did not look human were scattered about.

"It appears that colors are few in number."

"That's because the compositions of the substances, like with proteins, only have a few types. Still, by combining their variety becomes immense."

"Each and every one of these... are they actually the peptides, the hemoglobins, the rhinoviruses that are in proteins, I wonder..."

"The last one's the flu virus, you know."

"Well, as I thought, it looks like something strange is going on, indeed."

It was just a part of the tip of my tongue, but it had this much variation in it.

"It's possible that the whole of the area, or depending how things go, the whole world is mutating into that."

"That is super shocking."

"I decided to christen these 'naughteins'."

"Naughteins..."

"But don't go reporting it."

"W-, why?"

"...we should just wait for this to settle down naturally, right. As far as our position is concerned."

Grandfather had become dark...

"No matter how you look at it, this is a Fairy Tale Disaster."

A Fairy Tale Disaster. He means that this is a problem that involves the fairies and on a scale that the damages reach all the way to humans.

"Oooh..." I was startled and reflexively bent back. "But that is altogether too irresponsible for people in the duty of Mediation, is it not?"

"It'll be all right. Their pranks don't turn fatal. And so things will definitely go back to normal at some point."

"I do think there are multiple examples of things settling without going back to how they were, however..."

"It'll be fine so long as things settle down."

"T-, that is letting sleeping dogs lie..."

But the fairy himself said he did not understand.

Factually speaking there was no one responsible, and when things settled down eventually, I expect a scapegoat will be necessary.

"I... would very much rather not make a casual sacrifice of a sheep like the one that appears in the Bible or the cow that appears in the Iliad!"

"Then will you research the cause? Can you do it?"

I was at a loss for words, and stood before the microscope.

I carefully surveyed the behavior of the naughteins.

"Well, just do your best, as you got to."

As I endlessly repeated the process of gathering cells and examining them, night fell.

"Ngh... my eyes sting..."

It was because I have been staring through a lens for an extended period of time.

But thanks to that I managed to deepen my understanding of naughteins.

The major point of the naughteins resembled those of proteins.

For example, immunoreaction.

Just like antibodies neutralized pathogenic germs and protected the body from disease, protein used many attack patterns to remove antigens.

And I saw those as guns and swords and magic.

Proteins concerned a variety of chemical reactions and nerve transmission.

Even among the naughteins there were some that destroyed enemies like antibodies, accumulated experienced, and wandered from place to place like errand boys. These adventurer type naughteins occasionally acted as neurotransmitters.

I also spotted naughteins gathering nutrients and transporting them. They looked like cars and motorcycles, perhaps because they moved around so quickly.

There were a great many more, of course, but my skills could not match up to Master Microscope's capabilities, and after investigating things up to this point, I hit my limit.

As their energy was high, their venomousness was also extremely strong.

Properly speaking, these substances should be harmful beyond consideration.

Powerful immune factors disassemble the poisonous material, and as a result, an energy was created that could manifest the most absurd of phenomenons. Or rather, let us leave it at that, please.

I also figured out the cause of the problem of the vanishing construction materials.

The cause was of course in the naughteins. The secret was hidden in these naughteins, these smallest units of denominations with their especially low number of concatenations of pixels.

"So even naughteins had something like peptides."

I made my report at dinnertime and Grandfather quickly showed interest.

"Exactly. I believe that is how they are."

Peptides, to explain simply, are proteins with a low number of aminoacids.

"What shape did they have?"

"...Grandfather, do you know about tetrominos?"

"I do know. It's a puzzle with shapes like a number of connected squares. Depending on the number of squares, the way they're called is different. Dominos have two squares, five are pentominos. Tetrominos will have four squares. Fitting poliminis with different shapes together precisely inside a frame is an intellectual game, I'd say."

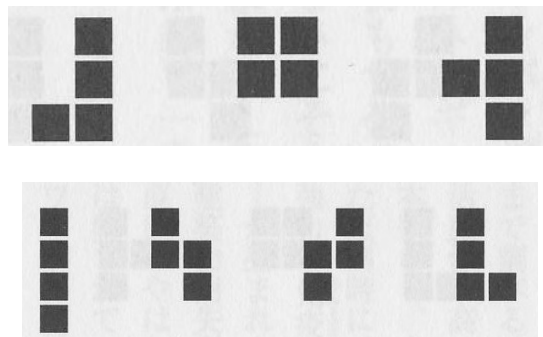
"That is exactly how they are. That is, they are tetrominos."

"So peptides, naughtein edition, resemble tetrominos."

Grandfather asserted that with his spoon lifted a bit.

"Yes... four pixels link together, and there are a number of varieties of how they are set up... well, it is sort of like this."

I drew in the air with my fingertips.



"These seven are the ones I spotted."

"Mh-hm, very good. It seems you did a really competent job."

Grandfather was elated.

"And, these tetrominos, you see... they are vanishing, and into thin air."

"Under what condition do they disappear?"

"...it appears that when they are linked together and there is one horizontal line with no gaps, that line alone vanishes."

"One whole horizontal row vanishes. It literally vanishes?"

"Yes."

Pixels were the smallest screen units.

There was nothing smaller, in other words they were similar to atoms and particles in the real world.

And their disappearance was, in other words, the same as physical annihilation.

"That seems really important. Might be a quantum problem."

"So it seems, indeed..."

I hear that in the quantum world, a variety of quite unbelievable phenomena occur as daily events.

The annihilation of naughties had an aspect that resembled those.

"They're energetic, also they're able to quantically annihilate the unnecessary, then. All the heat and the waste products. And so, you can't tell me it's a mystery when something like that happens in the macro world."

"I was exactly wondering whether that was the case..."

"And houses are vanishing. I get it. So, what do you think you need to do to make sure houses don't disappear?"

"Huh. The first and simplest thing would be, well..."

The next morning I gathered the workers and announced how we were going to deal with all this.

"Leave a gap in the bricks with each row we lay? I don't get this..."

"Please do as I say."

"..."

Assistant-san sharply showed his sketchbook, pointing at a diagram.

It was a house with missing teeth.

They were to intentionally leave a gap in each row of bricks they laid.

The faces of the macho workers had nothing but perplexity.

"W-, why do we have to do that? I don't really like doing a job this sloppy..."

"...explaining things would be a little bit problematic... so... I apologize."

"But you know, this is gonna turn out into a house full of holes?"

"If you do not do that, I believe it will disappear as soon as you build it, you see?"

"Hmph..."

Naughties seemed to have proliferated through the whole of the Village area.

A worker's conference had begun.

"What do we do?" "I think wind's gonna blow in, what do we do 'bout that?" "Are we all right with structural strength?" "If we keep making holes, people can peep in from outside and stuff?"

In conclusion,

"...is that good as a stopgap measure?"

"Certainly... and at some point, we might be able to solve this..."

"Gotcha. Then, for the time being at least, we'll get something done... but wind and rain's gonna blow through, you know?"

"Please do the best you can..."

"What'd you say?"

"Ah, nothing, I did not say anything!"

I have to do my best so that I would not become a scapegoat...

And so the construction of lodges with the proposed plan continued at a rapid pace.

"Whew, we got it done somehow, Young Sensei."

Through stampede tactics, three houses were completed in a mere half a day.

"Next there's only to get the Village girls to set up the inside, I guess."

It happened right then.

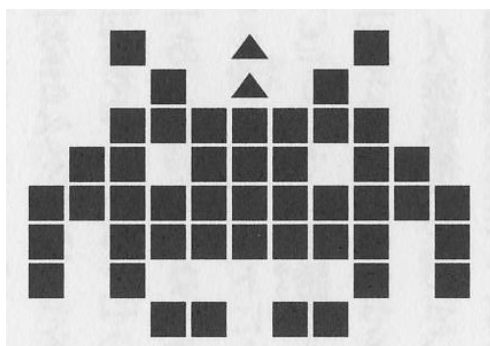
"The hell's that!"

Somebody shouted that and pointed at the sky.

"It's flying!" "It's not an animal?" "Doesn't look like a bird or an insect..." "That a monster?" "It's a little simple for that..." "And teensy, too."

There was a terrifying flying monster!

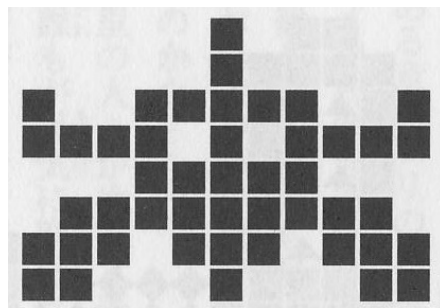
Assistant-san drew by filling in graph paper, and this is what the monster looked like!



It was impromptu, so it may be that even Assistant-san could not replicate it perfectly, you see.

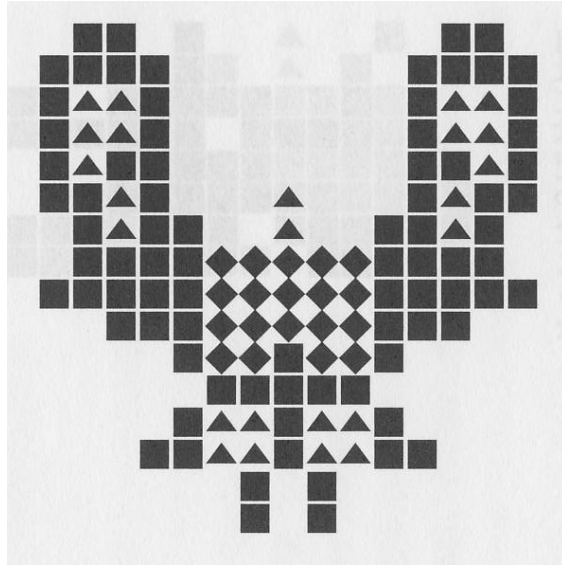
The number of horns, for example.

Also, there was one like this.



It felt like it had two horns...?

But what drew my eyes the most was this massive monster.



That was disgusting!

"What an efficiently creepy monster!" "Even with lacking graphics I can still somehow tell it's a monster!" "A great depiction in a certain sense!" "This is the precise critical point of minimalist art!" "A strong proposition against modern graphical arts and their uncontrolled bloating!"

The people were making a bustle about more complicated things.

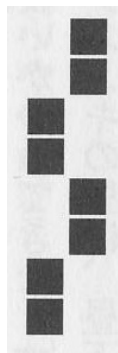
"Hey, guys, aren't they coming down bit by bit?" "Now that you say it..." "Wonder if this is all right..."

The people of the Village showed up one after another and began making a racket.

They were all struck dumb.

No one could imagine what was about to begin.

And as we were in that situation, the monster's mouth spat out something, and it was this.



I thought it some tubiflex worm, but it was actually a destructive beam.

Ka-ting.

With a satisfying sound effect, the beam smashed down the chimney of a building that had just been built.

"He's attacking!" "He's an invader!" "He's an alien!"

Kusunoki Village was caught in chaos right in the early afternoon.

These tiny aliens went in formation and rained down destructive beams, but what was more

terrifying than anything was the special beam that the larger alien fired.
It was a beam that sucked up the things in its area of effect, whatever they were.
GalagaGaGaGaGa, the thief beam stole away things that were irreplaceable for the people of the Village.

"Bwaaah, my doll!" "Eeek, my fiancée!" "My grandmother's favorite cane!" "Hyyyh, my wedding ring!" "My kittens!" "My wig!"

A plundering storm struck the Village.

It was terrible.

"W-, what kind of plan could I even make that would bring this under control... the powers of the fairies, what else?"

I dragged the fairy from my pocket and found he was in a rounded-up capsule form.

"Mister fairy, mister fairy, this is the climax already, please grant me my wish!"

But the fairy remained asleep.

"Right, it is full of people around here, so he will not wake up... EEK!"

A destructive beam fell at my feet, and a block-shaped fragment blew up from the ground.

Assistant-san pulled my hand.

This boy was always and ever cool-headed.

"..."

And still with his cool head he was stolen right up in the sky.

Bye bye, he waved his hand.

"WAAAIT!"

Assistant-san ended up stolen!

I saw several large aliens, headed by a flying pixel saucer, fly towards the Office.

At the Office there were fairy tools stored.

I headed towards the Office at a wild dash.

...they had done it.

I had arrived after the majority of the fairy's Secret Goods had been stolen.

The majority of the garbage and the documents at the Office had also been taken away.

"This is terrible..."

"I see you're safe."

Grandfather was in one piece.

Or rather, he was calm. He was drinking coffee alone.

"As far as my memories go, there weren't that many important documents in the warehouse, you know."

"But the tools..."

"I think we just go rid of a nuisance."

Well, no, I actually thought that at some point I would be able to employ them.

Or so I whispered in my heart.

"But Assistant-san has been kidnapped."

"I know that. I nearly got kidnapped myself."

"How did you get away?"

Grandfather did not speak, he lifted up the shotgun he had at his feet.

"Hyeeeh!"

"This is for shooting clay pigeons. There was even a flying saucer, had this been a contest I would've gotten some really good points."

Grandfather said that with a high-score face.

"Those guys, when shot, threw about dice-like fragments as they fall to pieces."

"I see."

He was really living a life of fun... I could not say anything.

Now that I had lost all my strength, a guest had come.

"Sensei, I got a thing or so to ask about."

An emergency planning meeting was held by the victimized residents at a bar.

The people who had important things stolen from them were flying into a rage.

These people who normally were so mild-mannered, and who had forgotten quarreling, now had their faces twisted in hatred like man-eating fiends.

That was scary.

"Those rotten invaders, how dare they steal my favorite underwear. I just want to slowly tear them limb from limb!"

The best embroiderer of the Village, an eighty years old lady, spat out.

"Taking away my plushies, really, they don't know what their lives are worth! If I catch them, I'll stick them to a board like living specimens, one by one!"

A girl of the lovely kind, who had just seen her ninth birthday and had been bathed in the blessings of the Village, spat out a curse.

"Why, I got my poem notebook that I whittled away at my own soul to write stolen! It was a masterpiece collection where I depicted the essence of the most beautiful scenery, if they don't give it back it ain't gonna end well..."

An uncultured-looking male gritted his teeth hard.

The bar was burning bright with anger for the invaders.

"So, what's that you wanted to ask about?"

"Ahhh, Sensei. And your granddaughter, too. Thank you for coming."

The man, the representative of the victim's meeting, could not fully hide his embarrassment as he said that.

"Truth is, you see, I believe you have already heard this, but invaders have attacked the Village."

"I did hear that. Seems many things got stolen."

"Yeah... so, we got the young ones and they at least found out the secret hideout of these guys. It's, well, and here's the problem, near some old underground ruins."

"An underground city, huh. That's their stronghold?"

"Exactly... well, the ruins themselves aren't that dangerous, but these don't look like opponents that would listen to reason, and so we were starting to talk about how we'd rather be attacking them."

"War, then."

Grandfather's eyes shone and sparkled.

"...yeah. But that said, we aren't going to do anything so mean. We're just going to kill them a little bit."

"And are the guys who came from outside coming with?"

"No. They have to clean things up, and they must continue with preparations for receiving the Monument Project people. We're talking about only dispatching the elite. It's just... us guys, we don't have any experience in fighting. We don't have special weapon skills... and so Sensei, if you please, you must, well..."

"Mh-hm. I more or less get it. You need weapons."

"Yes, if there is anything suitable from your collection, Sensei."

"Hey, you there."

He called to the workers taking up camp in a corner of the bar.

"Yes, Sensei."

"Is that underground room safe?"

"Yes, damage zero, sir."

"Then we go, don't we. Open up the weapon storage."

All the people in the bar joined up in a war cry.

Grandfather's weapon storage was in an underground room outside the Village.

"Amazing, look at how many weapons..."

One of the Invasion Suppression Force whispered that.

In this large room made of stone there were as many weapons gathered as one could gather. There were quite enough to be proud of.

Swords, spears, bows and arrows, guns, armor... all in number beyond count.

"Go on, pick the weapon you're gonna use. It's just that there's many guns that don't have ammo, and they're likely hard to use for newbies. Feel free to use a bladed weapon and an armor suited to your constitution."



"This is amazing! Look!"

A youth shouted and pointed at a prototypical full body armor and helmet that seemed covered in metal slates from the top of the head to the tip of the toes.

"That's a gothic-type armor. It's said to be a replica of the attire of the aristocracy of Bourgogne in the war period. It's a treasure, but if the Village is in danger, I'll let you use it. It weights 205 kilos."

Grandfather did not wait to add an explanation.

"Gh..."

The youth shed cold sweat as he left the area around the armor.

If he were to wear 205 kilograms of metal he could not even be expected to move properly anymore.

"This sword looks like it can break things."

Another one took in hand a massive sword that had been hanging on the wall.

"Mh-hm, it's heavy... I just can't equip it!"

"That's a Scottish Claymore two-handed sword. Since it's held with both hands it's highly lethal and easy to use. Makes it hard to carry shields, though."

"No, no, I can't really swing this thing. Carrying a shield would be totally impossible."

"What's this spear?"

"Helmbarthe. It's a German thing from AD 1500, while faint there's residual traces of blood on the blade, so it's highly probable that it has drawn blood... the handle part aside, the blade is said to be the real thing."

"Hyyyh!"

"Is this massive sword even meant to be used by people?"

"That there's a perfect match for what the ancient mercenary force Landsknecht used. They wore flashy clothes and wanted to experience the beauty of scattering on the battlefield, I hear. Though I suspect this can't be really used by a beginner."

"What is this bow about?"

"An English longbow, huh... that's a weapon that requires mastery. Once you get used to it, power and range are nothing to sneeze about. It's said that it was more powerful than the first musket rifles. Still, I wouldn't recommend it."

"This armor looks light, how about?"

"That's sheet armor said to have been used by the heavy infantry of ancient Greece. The legend handed down with it is that, to ensure there would be no impediment in bending and flexing, it was worn with nothing whatsoever in the lower half of the body, but I can't tell if it's truth or lie."

"Naked's, yeah... I'd say that's a bit..."

The weapons and armor that the Invader Suppression Force members were pointing at were each and every one intended for experienced people.

It was rather that the ones that could be used by the inexperienced were uncommon.

Or rather, it was natural that the majority of Grandfather's collection would be intended for the experienced.

Thinking about it, famous weapons and armors would, originally, require strict training in order to be used.

"What's this sword covered in runes?"

"That's Stormbreaker. A nice little magical sword that even those with weak constitution can use."

"Naiss."

"But it has problems, it tends to kill the user's most precious people, you can't use it unless you're of a specific imperial family, and more."

"..."

"Want to see if it's the real thing by testing it in actual battle?"

"No... I's fine."

No one could equip the most promising weapons.

And so, as a result,

"Sensei, these five will go."

There were five gallant men and women, and their equipment was as follows.

Name: Invader Suppression Force Knight 1

Good - commoner

Level: 1

STR: 7

AGI: 2

WIS: 4

HP: 27 (X)

AC: 9

♂ x 1

1) CUSPIS (Neolithic-age spear)

2) ROBES (Cloth)

Name: Invader Suppression Force Knight 2

Neutral - commoner

Level: 1

STR: 4

AGI: 3

WIS: 5

HP: 12 (X)

AC: 9

♀ x 1

1) COOKING SWORD (a kitchen knife)

2) APRON (worn when cooking)

Name: Invader Suppression Force Knight 3

Neutral - commoner

Level: 1

STR: 8

AGI: 1

WIS: 2

HP: 25 (X)

AC: 9

♂ x 1

1) ROD

2) ROBES (Cloth)

Name: Invader Suppression Force Knight 4

Neutral - commoner

Level: 1

STR: 4

AGI: 6

WIS: 4

HP: 14 (X)

AC: 9

♂ x 1

1) ROD

2) ROBES (Cloth)

Name: Invader Suppression Force Knight 5

Neutral - commoner

Level: 1

STR: 1

AGI: 8

WIS: 8

HP: 9 (X)

AC: 9

♀ x 1

1) SLING

2) ROBES (Cloth)

Bwah, what a completely disorganized crowd, I ended up thinking.

"They're courageous young people."

Grandfather's praise was irresponsible.

"We want you as the sixth fighter, Sensei, so you can take charge as team leader."

"That duty will be taken over by my highly experienced granddaughter."

"...huh?"

First underground floor of the invader's labyrinth.

"...huuuuh?"

Next thing I noticed, us six were standing in a dimly lit underground.

"Captain, your orders, please."

"...huuuuuuh?!"

A youth wearing a mask, and perhaps trying to use it as helmet, came to speak to me.

"Or... ders...?"

"The invaders' base lies underground here. Let's go and beat them up."

"Well, you can call it beating them up, but, see..."

In the pixel precision of this isometric view I could tell very well how lackluster our equipment was.

This... was death.

If we did things wrong we would put our lives in danger.

That presentment was squeaky loud inside me.

"Ah, I wanna find the enemies soon! Let's beat them into the landscape!"

A line bursting with evil omens exploded out.

The five thought nothing as they advanced forwards. They knew no fear.

"You filthy unidentified capital letter!"

The enemy was... D.

No, that was not a censored term.

A capital letter D was standing there, right as it was, you see.

Whether it was my appraisal skills or something else, I understood instinctively that this was a dragon.

Far in the past, back when graphical capabilities were low, letters and symbols were used like this, in the stead of graphics. What for I did not know either, certainly not those things.

Regardless, the D was a dragon.

It was just, perhaps because the pixel precision was high, the D was a D drawn with precise texturing for a D, it was pointless to the point of sublimity, I thought.

"Ngh... people, running away from this would be..."

"It's a fiiight!" "I'll tear you into steaks!" "I'll beat the tar out of you!" "Oooh, I'm really gonna do this!" "I'm gonna use punishment as pretext and have you say sayonara to this world!"

Hopeless, these people. They were too much into this.

The five readied each their own weapons and attacked the D.

The D breathed fire.

The five were taken down nearly simultaneously.

"You are far too weak!"

Or rather, was the enemy not too strong?

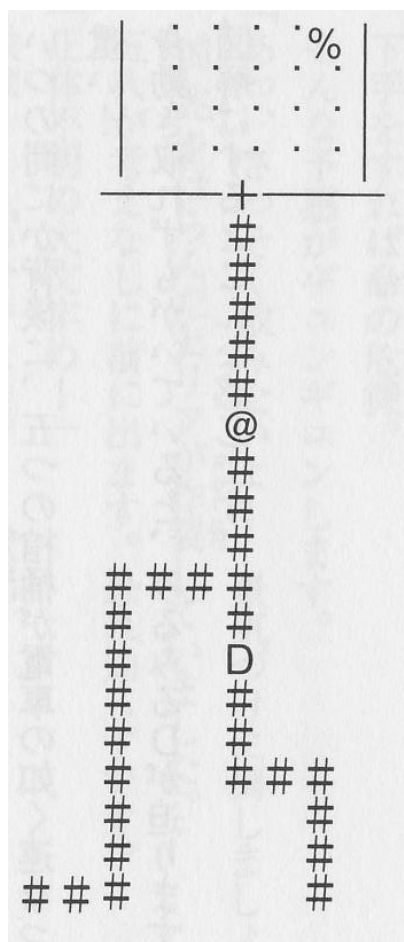
I ran away like a fleeing rabbit... except I was not allowed to.

At some point, five coffins were dragged behind my back like train carriages. By chains.

So heavy!

I struggled, unable to move a finger, and the D kept coming closer and closer.

To draw a map, it went something like this.



% = staircase

. = explored floor

= passage

@ = I
D = monster (dragon)

The state of the art of ancient graphics was seriously troublesome, indeed.
"Wait, this is not the time to act all casual...!"
The D was now coming from right ahead.
I headed for the room with the staircase, frantically moving my feet, but the coffins were too heavy and I could not move one millimeter.
The D followed me into attack range and spat a savage fire. Breath weapon.
"EeeEEEEK!"
And there, that one time, I was sure I had died.
Together with a pleasant Game Over sound.
"...huh? I am alive?"
I was uninjured, I had collapsed to the floor.
The coffins remained unchangedly five. My clothes were not ruffled.
"What happened? I was sure I was cooked..."
The D came attacking once again.
"HE WAS STILL THEEERE?!"
I lost control.
In a state close to terror, I reflexively tossed forwards whatever my fingertips would grasp.
Even if that were just a thumb tack, I would have still acted the same.
I had my mysterious laser gun ready.
"This was given me by Assistant-san... I can use it!"
The D charged.
I regained just a little bit of composure and unhurriedly squeezed the trigger.
Ka-klunk, there was a light sound and the laser clacked away the D's face.
"Waaah, so weeeak. How cuuute~!"
His weakness made me reflexively calm down.
The D also stopped for an instant (he might have been struck dumb).
However, he quickly came to attack.
"Oh no, oh no, no!"
I was doing nothing but panicking on the spot.
"Ah, right."
If I could sever the chain that bound me to the coffins...
However, I was flustered and I could not aim correctly.
The D was rapidly approaching.
While I accepted that it would not be effective, I reflexively pointed the gun barrel forwards.
Fire.
A massive hole opened in the floor.
And the D, which was just charging, fell into that hole.
"So... it was a hole-digging gun."
Assistant-san had pulled this out of the warehouse, no mistake.
It was definitely one of the Secret Goods of the fairies.
Maybe it was because the design was sort of like a futuristic gun, that could have been the extent of the reason why I thought that.
The D was raging at the bottom of the hole, but it did not seem like it was going to be able to come out.

As time passed, the hole will automatically be filled.

Why will it be filled?

It was not like I wondered that, but that was how it was.

Though it looked like a dug hole, it was actually a space pushed aside that then closed, or some other trans-SF explanation, I was sure (AKA guessing at random).

"I am saved..."

The instant the D was buried in the hole, fanfares played in succession.

"Wah, what is it this time...?"

It continued for several minutes, and by the time I was getting fed up with it, it stopped at last. I think it was something like level up sound effects.

I opened the status menu and looked.

Neutral - Apprentice Scholar (BIS)

Level: 10

STR: 14

AGI: 13

WIS: 18

HP: 78 (X)

AC: 7

♀ x 2

"I got super powered up!"

But the number of ♀ decreased by one.

"...I do not understand them. The rules of this neighborhood, I just do not."

The D had a high experience value, that was what it meant.

My strength went up and I became able to drag the five coffins, so I shouldered the chain and, with a great deal of heave-ho, returned to the staircase.

"How am I going to carry these up the stairs...?"

Back as I was, I was still not strong enough to lift up the coffins and shoulder them.

I was at a loss for a while, then suddenly I was visited by a flash of inspiration.

GFX level: LO ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ HI

Absurdity: LO ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ HI

Physics calculation: automatic

Genre: full genre

I thought for a while, and suddenly tried to move the graphics level slider.

As my strength was higher I managed to make it easily slide.

GFX level: LO ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ HI

My view shivered.

A tremendous overwriting was taking place.

The labyrinth, which had been depicted only by symbols, suddenly changed into an elaborate isometric view with the highest degree of accuracy.

"...marvelous."

The dark, bare rock, the moist dark spots on the floor, the odd bumps in the wall...

The skillfully detailed graphics had the dignity of a live action adaptation of this fantasy world. These were no longer 16 bit.

It was at a level of beauty that my imagination could not catch up to.

If this is how it was inside the labyrinth, once I went outside I might see a world of transcendently beautiful graphics.

The woods might be shining, the lake surface would reflect the light, the Village's cityscape would be idyllic.

A challenge to the extremes of pixel art!

I took out a pocket mirror and stared at my own face.

"My!"

This was fine, very fine.

I looked mature, I had an overall increase of pixel density by about 30%.

There was a competent-looking adult woman looking back in there.

"Righty, now that I am level 10, this is how I would be."

Better, I could increase the graphical level more.

"..."

I went and lifted it up by another step.

GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☒☐☐ HI

My heart beat fast as I waited for the graphical update, but then...

Suddenly, I was all blocky inside the hand mirror.



"GyohGyoooooooooh!"

There was not a trace of that beauty of a moment ago.

I had blocks, I had blocks, and as a bonus I had another block, not a single trace of curves!

Composed only of straight lines, a creepy angular woman with a face that did not seem to be a human's stood there.

Shading had vanished from my skin color, and I was nearly monochrome.

It was worse than some doodle made by a kid...

The transformation reached every part of my body, and even my hands were represented by cuboids, were they not.

"Just what does this all mean?"

The labyrinth, too, had been replaced by a simple 3D labyrinth.

"...why?"

I had raised the graphical level, so why did things get worse?

GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☐☒☐☐ HI

Seeking the truth, I raised the graphical level even more.

The slider had become so heavy it felt glued, so it looked like this was my limit with my current strength.

There was a massive change.

My face, too, the visuals of its angles became more detailed, and the blockiness improved significantly.

My featureless skin got also an improved coloring applied to it.

"But the one before that was much better. Why?"

I thought I had increased the graphical level.

I tried touching my face and found that there was something like a film stuck to its surface.

I managed to peel it off.

Below it, I caught a peek of a my plain-colored face.

"!"

I pushed the film back onto my face.

I realized that that was data stuck to surfaces in order to improve the visual quality.

"I get it... 3D graphics are considered to be a higher level than pixel graphics..."

They were not bad, but I had a feeling they were worse than the highest level of pixel graphics.

They were sort of angular, and I could not wipe away an awkward feeling.

"Ahhh, polygons... these are polygons, then."

A term I had never heard before came to my head.

Before, I was around 100 polygons.

Now I was 500 polygons.

The higher the number of polygons, the higher the level of realism increased, looked like.

"In other words..."

Level Up → increase STR and WIS → change GFX level → transform into a super real pretty girl! B E A U T Y !

"!!!"

Swink, and a lightbulb lit over my head.

That was not a metaphor, it was a real polygonal effect.

"...but earning experience on my own is completely impossible."

I slumped my shoulders.

"That's tootally not true?!"

The fairy (150 polygons) returned to life.

"Ah, now you really look like a fairy!"

The fairy smirked and threw out his chest.

"If you summon us, we will work for free?"

"We'll be your slaves, master human!"

"How do I perform a summon?"
"Magic?"
"Magic, he says..."
There was a magic field in the status menu.

MAGE 6/6/5/5/4/0/0
PRST 5/6/6/4/4/0/0

"Spells! Spells!"
The fairy hopped about.
I tried displaying the spells I had memorized.
The priest class spells were displayed in a neat row.
There were seven maximum levels of spells, and the number of times each level could be used was seemingly limited.
I could use Level 1 five times, Level 2 six times, Level 3 six times... that was how things were.
The type of spell that mattered to me was,

Level 1 / None
Level 2 / None
Level 3 / None
Level 4 / None
Level 5 / Summoning Spell

"I only learned one, you know?"
"Master human, are you an atheist?"
"What, does being a priest class mean that?"
"Priests gotta believe in God!"
It was clear that this status had no point.
Conversely, the mage class spells were varied.
"How about I try using one. Fire spell, 'ei!"
Plop, and what fell down were an oil bottle and a book.
"Lessee lessee... the secrets of fire magic! Illusions that use fire employ a highly volatile oil..... AWAAAY!"
I tossed the oil and the book far away.
The fairy casually said this.
"Mage classes use sleight of hand!"
"That is certainly a form of magic, however."
It appeared that the only thing I could use properly was summoning magic.
"Now then, chant it and invoke my friends!"
I tried using the summoning magic.
"Fairies C'mon!"
"Yeees!"
Poing, a fairy hopped out from my breast.
"...what the!... how did you come... from there!"
"Randomly."
I held down my chest with one hand and once again summoned.
"...fairies C'mon!"

"Yeees!"

A fairy came out from a hole in the wall.

"C'mon!"

"Yeees!"

A capsule that tumbled in from the depths of the labyrinth burst and turned into a fairy.

"C'mon!"

"Yeees!"

One fell from near the ceiling with a parachute.

Four uses and my magic was out. But I had gathered five fairies.

"Well well well well well, thank you, thank you!" "You really came!" "I have this feeling that something's about to start!" "That makes my heart pound!" "Our age has come!"

I asked this to the fairies.

"So, how strong are you people when it comes to battle?"

The fairies remained expressionless as they suddenly became gloomy.

"The other day I lost to a rhino beetle." "I was totally defeated by a stag beetle." "I was bullied by a drone beetle?" "I was shaken down by a dragonfly." "I was used as a gopher by a praying mantis?"

"No good... adventuring is suspended."

The fairies dragged me to a stop as I tried to climb the staircase.

"Come, come!" "You gotta try things?"

"No, you people get beaten too easily by mere insects."

"We can use magic?"

"Eh?"

"We're mage classes!" "We're good, so good!" "Wanna try?"

"Then please show me your status screens."

"...and so it was seen at last."

The status screen of the fairies was displayed.

"I want to see individual information."

Good - unemployed (I)

Level: 479

STR: 1

AGI: 18

WIS: 1

HP: - (X)

AC: -9

* $x \infty$

MAGE 9/9/9/9/9/9

PRST 0/0/0/0/0/0

"Wow."

Amaaazing status.

Looks like the maximum for statuses like strength was 18, indeed.

There was no maximum level?

AC was low.

The hit points were void, what did that mean?

It seemed that something had become infinite.

Did that mean in short that they will not die, I wondered...
They seemed to be mages.
"But it is all sleight of hand, right?"
"Yes I guess!" "It's sleight of hand?" "Sorry, I say!" "But sleight of hand is interesting?" "Sleight of hand makes you happy?"
"But sleight of hand will not defeat dragons."
"Didn't it?" "Will it now?" "What was it, what was it?" "Don't know!" "We should just try!"
They discussed.
The fairy representative stated the conclusion.
"We're gonna try."
"...you know you will have to go and intentionally encounter a monster?"
"Telepoppo!"
The fairy cast a spell.
The next instant we were suddenly in a dark place.
It was a place darker than the one before.
And a much creepier, much more dangerous place, I thought.
"Uhm... fairies? Are you there?"
"We're here!" "We are!" "Here!" "Right next to you!" "We're always looking at you!"
What a relief, they were all there.
"What sort of phenomenon was that back there? Where are we?"
"We're..."

Tenth underground floor.

"HyEEEEEEH..."
That spell back there was a teleportation one.
"T-, that was not sleight of hand?"
"Teleportation is sleight of hand?"
"That is not sleight of hand!"
"That's how it is?" "Right?" "As a phenomenon, it's sleight of hand, you know?"
"No way..."
"Dragons, over there!"
"Gah, no way."
And what appeared was... not a D, but an actually well modeled dragons with about 3-400 polygons.
And they numbered an absurd seven!
The scene of a swarm of dragons sluggishly walking about was, to put it in another way, *a fun BBQ about to start! (but of people made of meat)*.
"Seriously, fairies... this is a fairly bit dangerous, how about?"
"We're gonna use a level 7 nuclear explosion you know?"
"Did you just say nuclear?"
Without even catching my words, the fair began chanting the spell.
"Toil in the toilet! (nuclear explosion)"
The seven dragons exploded.
There was a tiny mushroom cloud. It was a nuclear mushroom.
"Sleight of hand, you called this..."
The radioactive mushroom hot wind caused a tremendous shockwave in the labyrinth.

In this cramped labyrinth, the nuclear blast pushed away the air as it spread at a fast rate, overflowing in every single possible passage with a ferociously destructive storm. The high-heated and impactful turbulence left nothing for the living creatures to do except for being jostled about like wood splinters.

I was no exception.

Enveloped by the heat wave, my eyes clouded in an instant and I could no longer see anything.

The powerful shockwave tossed me in the air.

My lungs went pow. My limbs went crack. I revolved at a high speed both horizontally and vertically.

I pounded into the wall, I pounded into the ceiling, I pounded into the floor.

I heard the level up fanfare as a requiem as I lost consciousness—

Neutral - Apprentice Scholar (BIS)

Level: 13

STR: 16

AGI: 14

WIS: 18

HP: 118 (X)

AC: 7

♀ x 1

"Causing a nuclear explosion in a place that confined would make it end like that, it is only natural!"

"Awww..."

"That there was no sleight of hand!"

"But it was sleight of hand!" "See?" "Nothing special about it!" "Master human, I have a question?"

"What is it?"

"What are the configs?"

The other fairies too began bustling.

"The settings are off?" "It's too real?" "Realism alone isn't justice." "Can you check it?"

"Real?"

GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☐☒☐ HI

Absurdity: LO ☒☐☐☐☐ HI

Physics calculation: active

Genre: full genre

"Ah, the parameters seem to have changed for some reason..."

It appears that when I was playing around I made a mistake and changed the settings.

Messing with the settings without noticing, this was why touch-type interfaces were annoying.

As far as I could find out, the level of absurdity was extremely low, and the physics calculations were on.

"What happens when the level of absurdity is low?"

"Things become serious." "The story gets very dark." "Pretty things disappear." "Things won't end nicely." "If you explode you die for real."

"..."

Not one single good thing.

So that was the reason why I died so gorily...

"Pixel gore effects may be ignored, however polygonal gore is subject to ratings."

"Could it break up a child's personality?"

"It could."

The fairies began shivering and trembling.

"I understand what happens when it is low, still, what happens when the level of absurdity is high?"

"It all ends in a gag."

"..."

An acceptance that was accompanied by spiritual exhaustion.

Things that would merely turn you charred when absurd would, when in reality, result in you exploding to death, then. I see.

First, we cut off the physics calculations.

These physics calculations, when bouncing around things get sort of violent, how scary...

"This, and this too."

A fairy scrambled up to my hand and pointed at the red X mark next to the HP.

He touched it with his fingertips, the X vanished, and the HP display became functional.

"Ah, so that was how it was!"

It seems it was a system to swap between a life system and a remaining lives system.

That was why I kept dying in one hit.

"This is so hard to understand..."

Next was to do something about the level of absurdity, and that will be the end.

But, right then, a knight in silver armor appeared.

"...who might you be?"

"I am named Silver Knight. Well done reaching all the way down to the tenth underground level, foolish humans. I will have you pay for cruelly slaughtering my sister when she opened her heart so much to you!"

Seems a serious person had come by.

"Then I shall kill the people you love... there's nothing for us to do but kill each other... go on, draw your weapons. Time to settle this!"

"ei!"

Absurdity: LO ☐☐☐☐☐☐ HI

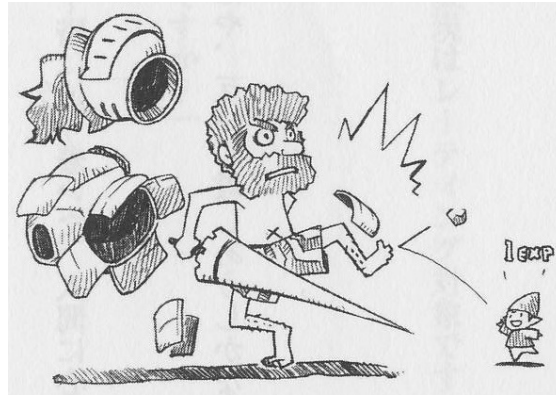
"Well, my sister actually only existed in my own mind, though."

The knight said that with a voice with no intonation.

"T'oYah!"

A fairy tossed a stone to the jet-black knight.

As the stone hit, along with the fairy gaining 1 EXP, the knight's armor shattered and scattered about, revealing a man wearing only a pair of pants.



"Bwoh, the hell's this!"

How he shouted that with bowed legs was the perfect figure of the resident of a gag world.

"Please have at him."

"Ayyyye!"

The fairy cast a spell.

"I wanna go to China! (nuclear explosion)"

"Gyaaah!"

A nuclear explosion occurred in extreme cold, and the silver knight ended up blown off somewhere.

"Koff, koff!"

Thanks to the absurdity setting, there was nearly no dangerous shockwaves, no show of gore, and it all ended with me bathed in smoke.

"I see, I see, things are fine like this. Fighting after all is hard, indeed."

Also, that knight's experience value seemed to be extremely high.

I had leveled up again.

GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☐☒ HI

I promptly raised the graphical level.

I reached 3000 polygons.

"Ohhh... this is jolly good."

Gorgeous graphics that made even subcharacters pretty made me the Prettiest Woman Ever.

To put it clearly, I was stylish.

This time it even gave me showy clothes.

The fairies, who had formed a line at my feet, looked up at me with unease.

Seeing their faces, I shuddered.

"Your eyebrows... they got so thick!"

Only the fairies' eyebrows had become unnaturally realistic, virtuous, manly, shaggy.

"Hyh!" I held my cheeks with both hands. "Only the eyebrow graphics! Became pretty!"

"Master human..."

However, the fairies themselves seemed to be worried about something else, and they fearfully opened their mouths.

"What is it."

"Your face, master human, it's sorta..."

"My face?"

"...it looks Western."

"Ngh!"

Shocked, I leaned into a wall of the labyrinth.

"Pretty girls in Western graphics look like that..."

"I feel scared!" "I want to feel warm and fuzzy!" "Realism has its problems!"

"...that is because I am still lacking in polygons."

I was decided.

"The number of polygons is graphical richness. For example, if I were a robot, with 3000 polygons it should be possible to display me as a wonderful mecha. But humans are beings made of curves, so I need even more polygons."

""""""Ohhh.""""""

"That is why I must level up, increase my strength, and once I raise the graphical level to the highest possible... a time of warm and fuzzy tranquility will then come."

""""""Ooohhh.""""""

To do that, I needed to gain experience.

"Can you excuse that excuse? (nuclear explosion)"

"Weasels have weaseled out (nuclear explosion)"

"The beast did his best (nuclear explosion)"

It was a storm of massacre.

"My level is not going up... but why."

"Experience value is not enough?"

"This is the tenth underground level, you know? Do enemies that give more experience than here even exist? I can gain the most experience in this floor—"

"Telepoppo!"

I was warped once again.

100th underground floor ~ ruins of an ancient superscientific civilization swallowed by a fault line~

There, the walls, the ceiling, and the floor too were covered without a single gap in red-black flesh.

"And..."

The creepy scene made me start shivering.

"You took me to an absolutely ludicrous place!"

There were sticky fluids on the ceiling and walls, and the floor was wet like it was made of slippery viscera.

The mood here was clearly different from before.

The walls were made of a red-black gel substance that seemed to be metal or organic matter. Just like something with life, it was squirming without hurry.

"This place isn't bad."

The fairies were calm.

"These are human ruins... not alien or something?"

"Well, they're human!" "From super back in the past!" "From super super back in the past!"

"From faaar in the past!"

"What unbelievable bad taste."

"It's been like this from the start!" "It ended up changing!" "Perhaps it was the extreme environment?"

"We are in an extreme environment?"

"There's magma right below!"

"Koff!"

My life was in danger!

"Is this not dangerous?"

"It's normal?" "It's calm?" "It's excellent for a vacation?"

"I wonder if we will be able to go back in an emergency..."

"So long as we telepoppo!"

OK, but if the fairies were to disappear for whatever reason, I would be completely stranded, indeed.

"...please do not disappear."

"If we can!"

The fairy said that with a bouncy tone with no trace of malice.

I felt uneasy.

"Could you subdivide? One of you is fine."

"What..." "You can't just summon us?"

"Got no more ability to use magic, I do not."

"Ah, right." "It's a weak point." "Then, do we do it?" "We do it?" "Let's do it."

The representative blurted this out.

"We'll increase like a crowded train."

The fairies brought a tissue box out from nowhere and (for some reason) reworked it into a papercraft train.

It was the beginning of a cheap sketch.

The fairies, who had changed into business suits, jumped one after another into that paper train. When the five entered, it was crammed full.

"It's full?" "Tightly tight!" "Don't push!" "Get out!" "Hang on!"

The fairies hopped about.

"Soon, we'll work hard in enemy land?"

"Are there enemies?"

"Seems so!"

"This wall is certainly made of incredibly organic material..."

I did know that technology like that existed, however.

Now that I said it, the lighting was also on.

It was not a white light, it was a red-black lighting that came from across the gel, however.

"I wonder where it is taking the energy from."

"Geothermal energy?" "Pressure?"

"Ahhh, I see..."

"Ah, it's here!"

The fairies suddenly scattered.

A red-black clump of meat came slithering from beyond the passage.

It resembled the material of the wall.

"Taiwan, I wan-tai! (nuclear explosion)"

The clump of meat recoiled, but it was not defeated. This was a powerful enemy.

"Sooo strong!"

"Just what is that weird thing?"
"Vacuum cleaner?" "It went feral?" "It got weird?"
Ahhh, that...
"So I get the reason why there is no furniture or machinery... hummm."
"Sleight of hand ain't working!"
On the spot, I panicked.
"Teleport us! Teleport us!"
"Telepoppo!"
No teleport occurred.
"Seems teleportation is forbidden?"
"Gyaaah!"
I picked up the fairies and ran away at a wild dash.
Amoebas have also been showing up.
"NOOOOOOOOO!"
As I ran pell-mell, I discovered one door.
The door was buried in the fleshy walls, and was of course all fleshy in make, but it was just barely still a door.
I suspected this floor also had actual electrical systems in its materials.
Errors had accumulated through the long years, and this is how it ended up.
"Electronic key! Fairy, open this! Say P'kin and open it!"
"P'kin... 'gh. (nuclear explosion)"
An explosion happened.
"If you say cold things you will cause an explosion! Be careful!"
"Sorries!"
Regretful, the fairy hacked the electronic lock and opened it in a second.
We prudently rushed into the room and closed the door.
Happily it was not inhabited by enemies, so I exhaled a sigh of relief.
Machinery remained in the room.
It did not even look corroded or deteriorated.
There might be usable items...
It was all clear with my appraisal skills. My eyes seized on one thing.
"This is..."
I took the tool in hand.
Why that would be useful I did not know.
I only visualized it having a powerful effect on the enemies.
And the item was—
"Revolving blades are cool?"
"...welll, are they now."
—a food processor.

The food processor was a super powerful attack item.
It did not really seem like a weapon, and I had no memory of how I used the tool and how I defeated them.
Regardless, I defeated them.

Tools → use → food processor

And that defeated them.
All the enemies I met in these depths I could defeat in one hit.
After defeating the amoebas they dropped Labyrinth Juice, an item that they all invariably carried, and I picked them all up.
As I wandered about, searching for stairs up, my levels increased one after another.
My skills went up and went down, a process that made me feel nervous, but once I hit level 25, I finally reached 18 strength (perhaps the limit value).
I moved up by several floors and reached a labyrinth of metal and stone.
Even there was inhabited by many types of deep-level monsters, but,
"Grapes, eat the juice! (nuclear explosion)"
The fairies cleared them up for me.
"Now then, let us move the slider up for the last time."

GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☐☒ HI →→→ GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☐☒ HI

"Ohhh...!"
I finally became a 10.000 polygon woman.
"I did it!"
My figure reflected in the mirror was sort of sparkling.
"...I really feel like a different person."
I could not wipe away the odd sensation that the image of my beauty had been directly edited.
"Still, I am ridiculously cool, yeah. Let us just live like this."
It seemed that the burden of processing super beautiful graphics was terrifying, as motion became incessantly awkward, but it was a trifling problem.
"Fairies, thank you very– gyaaaaah!"
I could not see the adorable fairies anywhere.
In their stead, there were five monsters.
"Geh geh geh, what's up, big sis... something stuck to our mugs?"
A gnome with a triangular hat and a body with firm muscles despite being about the height of a child said that with a deliberately rude voice.
"Ewww! Your mug's hideous, makes me wanna puke! Obvious she'd have problems, bleargh!"
A gremlin that looked like a half-fish spewed venom at him without a moment's delay.
Ptooiie, he spat out the gum he was chewing and it flew right at the gnome.
"HyaaHah! Kill ya, gonna kill ya! Today I's not seen blood yeeet!"
The Korpokkur, the mythical Ainu dwarf god, who insulted him was one size smaller (but still several times the size of the original fairy). He had very ethnic clothes and a knife and, perhaps out of habit, he was making his tongue crawl on the blade as if revering it.
"Hih Shih Shih Shih Shih! All you pricks' faces just make me wanna throw up. Obvious the lady would feel bad about you. Right, lady?"
A tiny, unsightly goblin wearing worn-out clothes overturned his lips and dangled cloudy drool as he spat out words of scorn.
"Heh heh heh, sorry girl, we're making noise here. Us guys, we don't got refined manners like them master humans. And so yeah, always happens we get into doing this stuff. But me, I'm different from these guys. Me, I don't need nothing 's long as this guy's here!"
A stout leprechaun of tiny build and growing a mustache promptly put his mouth to a bottle of alcohol and drank it.



"...are you... fairies?"

This was the harmful influence of graphical level MAX.

Right, these were realistic fairies.

They were far too realistic, they were not in the slightest teensy bit cute.

"...or rather, you are half monsters, are you not."

"Geh geh geh, and that aside, why'd us guys come here for?"

"K'shaaah! I's forgot even that. Big sis's come here to beat the tar out of them bastards who stole her treasures, ain't she!"

"HyaHah! It's a kiiiii! Killing's awesooome!"

"Hyh Shih Shih Shih! Don't be in such a hurry. Soon... soon a rain of blood's gonna fall, get me."

"Heeeh heh heh, a cocktail of sake and blood's a stylish thing."

Harsh words.

"Well, let's go, you piles of trash! On to the final battle!"

The five fairies came together and carried me up.

Somebody shouted *teleport*.

My body lifted up light, and after a single breath, we were soon at the tenth underground floor.

We were before a large wooden door.

On the wall next to it there was this sign.

Office of the Idol to Everybody, the Kidnapping Princess

Business Hours: 9AM - 3PM

Dear folks being managed, all you devil kings and evil gods, don't you want to monopolize your princess?

Then we're responding to your demands! All cases negotiable, appointment needed.

At present, the Kidnapping Princess is IN.

"No mistake, this is the castle of the one behind all this."

"Then we hit 'em, the bastards!"

"Before that, I want to lower graphics a little bit..."

Without even time to do that, the fairies kicked down the door.

These people were merely violent.

Its support smashed the door moved, slamming into the interior wall.

The tremendous sound made the gazes of all inside turn towards us.

It was a swarm of pretty boys and pretty girls linked by a chain.

The people kidnapped from outside were blessed by the beautification of graphics and had all turned into pointlessly beautiful characters!

"Good looks are waaay too cheap..."

Quite the complicated state of mind to have, that.

"Who're you!"

I was struck with a sharp demand for my identity.

There was something of a massive hall laying there.

In the center there was a pile of the treasures stolen from the Village, and the people of the Village linked by a chain were sorting through them.

And beyond them, in an elevated spot, there was a throne installed, and a beautiful girl was slouching on it.

"...are you that town girl from back then?"

"You're from back then!"

I immediately understood who the Kidnapping Princess was.

It was that suspicious little girl I had met at the Office a while ago.

When she had been pixels I could not quite tell, but she was wearing a beautiful tailored dress like that of royalty or nobility like it was her casual clothing.

Two eyes filled to the brim with a lust with no bottom were nailed firmly on me.

"Ohdear, there's lots of them humans! I can't stand this!"

Even with those ferocious faces the fairies' personalities were as before, it seemed, as they all turned into armful-sized flesh spheres and tumbled on the spot. They were solid as stones, and when they rolled they made a heavy rumbling sound.

It appeared that, whatever else, I was going to have to subdue this young lady of my own strength.

"You there, please give back the things and the people that you stole from the Village!"

"I won't! I simply cannot leave them to you!"

"They are bound by chains, they are slaves, are they not!"

"I can take as many humans as I please!"

Though the little girl was several years younger than me, she was tremendously selfish.

"That statement is utterly unacceptable. I will punish you!"

I had a food processor.

"What do you think you can do alone!"

The little girl sneered and snapped her fingers.

Gigantified beetle-like monsters dexterously moved their jet black chitinous jointed legs as they appeared from every direction.

The invaders were still cutesy when they were pixelated, but once they became realistic they were grotesque monsters that chilled the spines of any who saw them.

"Those who resist get the death penalty! Do it!"

The monsters attacked.

It was a tremendously large swarm.

I faced them down with the food processor, but their number was too high and in the blink of an eye I was forced into the defensive.

"You're doing pretty well for yourself. You went up in levels a bit."

That was true.

Even these terrifying monsters, as long as it was just one of them, were no match for me at present.

But all I could defeat with one attack was at most one of them.

With a number this great... I might become exhausted at some point.

Worse, my body had been feeling heavy for the last while, and just moving my limbs had become difficult.

It was just a question of time before I was done.

"Watch out, miss granddaughter!"

The kidnapped residents shouted.

A monster had gone around my back.

"Oh no!"

I was attacked and my HP reduced by 50.

And like that I tumbled and was surrounded by the monsters.

"I know... how to deal with this...!"

I finally realized the reason why I felt so poorly.

And to solve that...

Still fallen on my face, I used my last strength to open the config menu.

As my shivering fingertips were reaching for the settings slider that caused all this, the Kidnapping Princess shouted this with a bouncy voice.

"That's it! Why, that's where it was!"

The princess rushed over and plucked the menu off from me.

...more like, it can get stolen?

"This is what we were looking for!"

The instant the menu was taken from me, I returned to how I was.

The fairy capsules, the people of the Village, everybody did.

"User change, done. This will do fine, yes. With this, we will no longer disappear in the data ocean!"

"Data ocean?"

A monster restrained me with a leg as I was standing up.

"Leave her. I don't believe that woman has any more power with which to fight."

Right. When the menu was stolen, I lost all the power that came with it.

"I will tell you why I am thankful for bringing this item to me. This is one of the Fairy Tools, the Universal Game Console."

"Universal Game Console?"

"A Tool that turns humans themselves into a game. It looks like a circular notice, but in reality it's a supertechnological virus that infects all substances, minds, and spaces of a whole land.

The moment it's activated, it spreads and turns the whole area into a gameplay zone. It turns every single substance into pseudo-data without harming their substance, safely and rapidly. It's a virus that infects everything."

The Kidnapping Princess messed with the settings, and every time she did the world altered in a wide range from pixels to super-beautiful polygons. My eyes prickled.

"But it has a problem. When the graphical level is set to its lowest, it becomes compatible with actual game data. They can no longer be distinguished, and they become linked."

"Actual game data? You mean the ancient electronic games?"

"That's right. We, who were inside the primitive game consoles and ROM cartridges preserved in this room, we all knew we were losing data due to degradation. This was our last hope. As cassette tapes and CD-ROMs fell to data death, only ROM cartridges survived to the end."

"So you people were originally data, is that what you are saying?"

I was sure the Kidnapping Princess was glaring at me.

"What's the problem? Even data is alive!"

"What, it is?"

"...i-, it is... maybe..."

I will not tell her that there is no precedent whatsoever for that, though.

Or rather, what is this being alive, what is this not being alive, I had no idea whatsoever anymore. Not around this Earth.

"But, see," the Princess' face suddenly clouded. "Once the switch is flicked on this Tool, we might vanish. And so, whatever else, we needed to find it."

"Then your objectives are fulfilled and you should be satisfied. Release the Villagers!"

"I won't!"

Hah, the Kidnapping Princess snorted and said this.

"After all, I just barely managed to become real, I want to live a life of amusement. Wouldn't

you want to enjoy a luxurious, full Princess Life by double or triple or quadruple timing some of the demon kings and heroes that you're just taking for a ride anyway?"

"Dear me! That is shameless!"

"It's called invadiiiiiing!"

"I will not agree with that!"

"It's not like I need your agreement or anything. It seems you didn't notice, but this menu can be used to change graphical level on single target. I will use this and turn you alone into pixels!"

I became a 16x16 pixel two-heads-to-body woman.

"S- STOP THIS, PLEASE!

YOU ARE SO MEAN!"

"And now that we've gotten to this point, how about I see how far we can go?"

I ended up becoming an 8x8 pixel human.

Eight by eight.

The lowest domain in which a human could be displayed.

"S T O P . . ."

I was simplified to the point where no one who saw me could tell that I was I any longer.

"Kyahahahahah! How fuuun! You're barely distinguishable as the icon of a person, right now!"

"N O O O O O . . ."

"And I can just become super pretty at the highest level of graphics. I will dominate the attention of people, no mistake."

The Kidnapping Princess was drawn with over ten thousand polygons, becoming a divinely pretty girl.

"Once I come to this point, even without going out of my way to invade, the men might come of their own will to give me money. Now that I remember, there was a young boy among the ones we kidnapped. I will put that boy one step below me and raise him as a pet."

"Y O U C A N N O T D O

T H A T !"

"Right now, no one can stop me! I can do anything. I can become anything!"

A gruesome joy came to the gorgeous face of the Kidnapping Princess as she rose beautifully.

Awww, so I cannot do anything anymore?

Will I have to live as 64 pixel data for the rest of my life?

And as I was about to give up on everything, a change came.

"What... is this?"

A white smoke rose up from the temples of the Kidnapping Princess.

"Eh, what? No... where is it coming from?"

No matter how much she fanned away the smoke, it did not stop.

Also, the Princess' face had turned bright red.

"T H I S I S I T !"

I realized what this was.

Because I was about to fall into the same situation not long ago.

"What the, it just keeps coming, it's scary!"

The Princess panicked and ran about, and the monsters around her were also confused.

Smoke kept on spilling over, and the Princess' face became redder and redder without bounds.

"No... I feel giddy... my body... it's so heavyyyy."

She collapsed flat on the ground.

I made my nearly nonexistent feet move restlessly, stood near the Princess, and stole away the config menu that was the Universal Game Console or whatever.

And then, without changing user, I dragged myself up to normal mode.

"Your ambitions end here!"

"What does... that... mean?"

"As far as I can see on this menu, your WIS is a mere 5. With those specifications, activity in super-beautiful 3D graphics is impossible."

"What...?"

It was the same for me before.

The price to pay for super-beautiful graphics is a demand for operation on the organic CPU (brain) at explosive speeds, and as a result, the body becomes overheated.

On top of that, operation becomes slow and there was even a danger of freezing.

"That's, ridiculous..."

Having heard the explanation, the Kidnapping Princess started crying.

"...right now, I could fry an egg on your forehead."

"I don't want to fry iiiiiiit!"

"You, you see, are the resident of a pixel field down to your bone's marrow."

"That's just too nastyyyyy!"

The people of the Village had removed their fetters on their own and gathered around us.

"Why's this little brat doing this to us?"

"Hyh!" The Kidnapping Princess began shaking. "Come on, don't kill me! I didn't kill you, after all!"

"F'oh hoh hoh, we won't kill you." A mild-mannered looking old man smiled. He took a knife out of his breast pocket and held it in his back hand. "...we'll just crush your remaining lives until you have only 1 left."

"I only have one! I only have one, I do!"

"Then how about we reduce your life gauge to the last pixel?"

An old lady approached the Princess with a large kitchen knife in hand.

"If you reduce it to the last pixel I won't have anything but my heart left! Stooop!"

Seeing it was the right time, I pressed her for answers.

"Are you repentant?"

"I am!"

"Will you do as you're told?"

"I will!"

"Will you apologize to everyone?"

"I will!"

"...and that is how it is, what will you do?"

I asked that to the people of the Village.

"Well, if you say so."

"I do."

"I returned the Princess to her original 8 pixels... but that was too pathetic, so I changed her back to a somewhat detailed 16 pixels.

"If you do anything bad from now on, I can always freeze you up, understood."

"...sob. Yes."

"And this settles the matter!"

A special effect of cherry blossoms scattering about appeared on the screen, and the curtain

fell.

Now then, as for what happened afterwards.

Truth was that a fair number of pixel people, who had scattered around, gathered in the underground labyrinth, built a town there, and began living in it.

The scene of them trading necessities and things at the Village with local specialties such as pixel feed, power feed, power mushrooms, and creeping coins (beetles camouflaged as coins) was becoming the norm.

Also, they put together side businesses of UFO tourism and moving things via beams, and they were quite well received.

The underground labyrinth was fairly close to the Village, so it was decided that it would be used as a leisure facility for the People Monument Project.

The children of the employees that had come by seemed to be delighted.

But there was just one problematic aftereffect of all this.

There just seemed to be a bug in the config screen, and the settings occasionally changed around despite not wanting it.

People walking around suddenly turned pixelated, become so obsessed with collecting ancient coins that they jumped high in the air and entered pipes and ransacked dressers in other people's homes, wore armor and stood on guard at bars, smacked balls into walls until they shattered them, all kinds of problems that did not stop for a while.

Messing with the settings every time was hard work.

In the end, I left config supervision to Assistant-san, and that took hold as the work he was in charge of.

He would certainly not misuse it, and he was good at learning a job one piece at a time.

The Kidnapping Princess lived busy days as the queen of the underground kingdom.

At present we were friends.

When I saw her earlier at a bar she had this very tired face from working so hard as she muttered *"every once in a while I wish I had a passionate love like I was kidnapped"*.

I was lauded for my achievements and given a very small territory in the underground kingdom.

I was also given the rank of honorary knight of the underground kingdom (as apology).

I rarely went all the way underground, so the territory they had given me (at the seventh underground floor) I wastefully disregarded, but one day I set my mind to it and began cultivating the shiitakes that I had gathered in the past.

For being shiitakes they did not quite spread and things were hard, but once I got the trick I managed to consistently cultivate them.

"Are these shiitake mushrooms? The flavor is really off..."

Every time I used them in cooking, Grandfather tilted his head.

"Still, for being tasty they're tasty. Could you get some drinks out?"

The problem with these shiitakes was that every time you ate one there was 1UP displayed, which obstructed the sights a little bit, but they were quite the delicacy, to the point where there even people coming for them from afar.

This was how things had been of late.

And still, I thought this:

Sigh, why do people always seek super-beautiful graphics...

I could understand it intuitively, but the instant it came time to explain it with words, things became difficult.

There was only one thing I could say.
And that was, an excess of beauty destroyed men, that was all.
Was it much too early for humanity to have high-level 3D graphics?
No, it may have been too late.
Same as how these people in decline love the good old arts.
Right, to us, the former humanity, excessively good 3D graphics were a double-edged sword, perhaps something of a forbidden fruit.
The Village has been calm of late.
People's graphics became flexible, we no longer saw extremes such as pixels and polygons.
But of course, it was a problem for humans to be overly concerned about super beauty. Yup.

"Oi, did you hear? Yeah, that young couple that came from the UN. I hear they split up, you know?"

"Whaaat, is that true?"

I was surprised at the gossip that Grandfather had found in the Village.

They looked like such a harmonious couple.

"What do you think, the husband raised his affection with another woman too far, that girl turned out to be yandere, and then the real problems started."

"Whaaat. What does that mean? Isn't that way too unrealistic?"

"No, seems that the yandere girl had this unpredictable personality. She set a man on the young couple's wife..."

"Whaaa, whaaa, whaaa!"

These days, Kusunoki Village was experiencing an unprecedented love boom.

The love boom led to a birth rate boom, a rush of divorces, and created all sorts of aftereffects.

Regardless, everybody was getting infatuated.

Everybody was gossiping around, "I raised my affection with that one," "I entered her route," it was a bit of a turn off.

"These days, that sort of stories are very frequent."

"Mh-hm. And that married lady two houses from ours, too..."

"Eh, that wife? Did you enter the Neighborhood Association Chief route?"

There was nothing as noisy as this sort of talk.

"And you got nothing of the sort?"

"...eh? N-, nothing... not yet."

"I'm gonna say it, I'm gonna spoil my great-grandchildren forever."

"What does that mean? Nothing of the sort will happen!"

"That was because it was hard to get a sense of the proper distance with my own granddaughter and I didn't really want to spoil her."

"Well, you can still start spoiling me right now if you want. You could be nice to me, for example."

"That won't be right for you, my dear granddaughter. If I have to say it, our granddaughter gets carried away when praised, so she's the type that should grow up in the spartan way."

"No, no, being praised is important, Praise me! Sparta and the like can go get destroyed."

"...say, are you actually raising affection rates?"

"I do nooot care about any of that. I am going to sort out the warehouse!"

"Ah... sorry. Are you all right?"

I bumped into Assistant-san in a corner of the Office building.
But he did not seem to be uncomfortable at all.
What a nice boy.

And Assistant-san then handed me a ticket.

"Eh? Concert tickets? You want to go together? Ahhh, it is an event at the labyrinth. Huuuuh, so this is what they are doing now. Still, the genre, I wonder what hell metal is... one hundredth underground floor? Uhm? Is it hell metal because it is done in Hell? How straightforward..."

Assistant-san lifted up his sketchbook.

There were no pictures, there were words, and this was what written on it.

YES?

NO?

I smiled a little, took the pen, and put a circle on the answer.

Dling dling♪!

"...is that sound not playing much too often of late?"

Assistant-san shook his head. He did not know.

"Another request for a change in settings? Right, do your best. I am going to clear out the warehouse. You want to help me? No need. I have to do this on my own. Grandfather said... next time I must no-jokes be supervising it carefully... I thank you for your sentiment, however."

Dling dling♪!

It played again.

What is it all about...?

Still not understanding anything, I parted from Assistant-san—

"Ah, right, right. Could you show me the config menu a little? I must activate my level 25 data. Without WIS at 18, I cannot catalog that warehouse... right, here."

I nimbly took the menu and, as uncommon, Assistant-san was flustered.

"I will give it back to you right away. I am just messing about with it a little. Why are you so flustered? You are being a weirdo. I said I will give it back right away. Ah, really, do not push it, ahahahah, jeez!"

Though obstructed I managed to change the settings, but the information that reached my eyes for just an instant was...

Neutral - Apprentice Scholar (BIS)

Level: 25

STR: 18

AGI: 15

WIS: 18

HP: 195 (X)

AC: 7

♀ x 99

GFX level: LO ☐☐☐☐☒ HI

Absurdity: LO ☐☐☐☐☒ HI

Physics calculation: automatic

Genre: bishojo game



"...bishojo?"

Assistant-san made a face like Munch's scream, stole the menu, and left at a run.

I had a feeling like I had understood the reason why there was a baby boom in the Village.

Wait, no, I actually did not really understand.

And that was why, these days, everybody at Kusunoki Village was drawn like in an anime.

Fairy Memo - Universal Game Console

Computer games are so alluring.

There aren't many children who can resist that allure.

However, each software has its own hardware required to play it on. Game hardware is expensive and not quite easy to obtain. If they want to play every game, no matter how much money they have, it will never be enough.

And there, this product appeared. Game consoles thus far, even though they cost a high price, could only play compatible software.

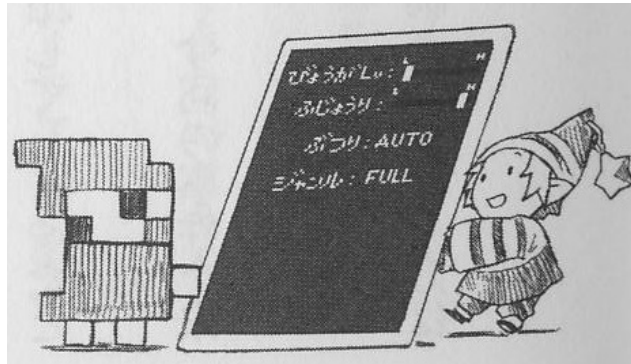
To play games published on other hardware, you could either pay more or wait for it to be ported, nothing else.

That's a turn-off!

But this product is different. After all, this Universal Game Console is capable of turning everything in the world into a game.

However it has drawbacks, it happens that the player's abilities and functions get manipulated.

Before buying, I'd like people to first try the demo, please.



Periodic Report for August

1. First Half

Nothing to report.

2. Second Half / Report Regarding the Malfunction of a Clipboard-like Fairy Bequest

At a glance the item appeared to be something of a report board that could freely appear near the user, but in actuality it was an extremely broad-reaching contaminant bequest.

The cause of the bequest's activation is unclear, it is thinkable that it had activated without anyone's knowledge due to mistakes performed during custody.

Now, that fact was not clear when the bequest had been taken to this office, and that was the reason why the accident could not be prevented.

The details of the events that unfolded due to the item's misuse are as reported on the accompanying sheet.

As far as the impressions of the person in charge goes, having a lives system in an emergency situation like this is of course extremely pointless, is it not?

It is often said that wizened technologies use lateral thinking, but in a situation of real danger, all we had to respond were called HP and level and parameters.

Also, no matter how good one's equipment was, it could happen that it became impossible to use depending on class, so that was a point in which care was required.

Supervision of bequests has many and varied points of consideration, and we believe we should be prioritizing dealing with this problem going forwards.

Afterword

Initially, the trend was that we would go without afterword this time, but of course I came to have to write it (the afterword is maybe used to adjust page layout). An afterword is in other words the author's present state of affairs. And lately it's been like this.

...I have no memories of doing anything but facing a monitor in a dimly lit room and writing on and on. I believe I did something, but the trivialities of each day did not reach my consciousness nor did they burn in my memories. As a result of remaining in that diseased spiritual situation for many a long hour my humanity regressed remarkably, and in its place something weird and mysterious surfaced from my subconscious, no mistake. The Silence of the Lambs, Misery, a Psycho detective with multiple personalities, Fujiko Fujio ㊤, stuff of that sort. In truth, the figure of an author loitering in a sealed room is the personification of a revenant smoldering in hatred for the living, and the growls emitted from his parched throat can't possibly be taken as human speech. As the TV I had left on had long since lost reception, it was throwing a sandstorm of video noise that knew no end which inorganically lit the room. As the night went on, that became the sole and only illumination. Rarely it happened that there was a woman shouting *"help me... help me..."* in the noise, but it did not reach my parched heart. An author standing stock still in a cold and dark room was about thinking about how to go beyond the genres that light novels had, which was something like wandering a maze with no exit. Continuing endlessly with questions that can't be solved makes the poisonousness of the self ferment, eroding mind and personality. When there was the occasional guest I gloomily welcomed him by opening the door by about ten centimeters and going *"...hi"*. The sparkle in the eyes of a face that had lost its shine was oddly unbalanced, and no one with a healthy mind would fail to go *"ngh!"* and stagger back. I was called constantly. Some callers were acquaintances and some were salesmen, but I couldn't properly return words to their calls. I didn't even have the sensation of being at the telephone. It was no more than an automatic movement wherein I heard the ringtone and picked up. However, this trend of living people coming to talk to me increased my negative internal pressure. The speakers eventually realized that the author's silence was not mere untalkativeness. The instant they sharpened their awareness to pick up the author's hoarse whispers,

a curse,

die die die die die die

was sort of how I had sooo much cheerful fun every day. I am H A P P Y . Oh, Tanaka, your lifestyle's worse than a demon's, thank you (solo performance).

By the way, these days, my lusts have increased once more.

Perhaps the reaction to being unfulfilled, my lust capacity was more or less one whole house's worth. Or, rather than one house's worth, I wanted a house. I think a house is necessary for a writer. And a house ought have a library.

Ahhh, a library.

Uhm, you know. Old men often say... these words.

"I wanna have a library!"

Dear me, I wanted to skim a list of rich people list and indiscriminately send telegrams.

"Gimme a library! Reply already!"

When things reach a certain point, even men can blurt this out all at once.

What pretext men use this space called a library for is simple to imagine. It has sublimated to the basic concept of Library. Men are oppressed every day. Their hearts are being pushed into the frame of sociability. That can't be healed except with an expanded mind. That's the wide space called a Library, the pleading of the soul brought by the rebellion of the mind.

Of course, I'm also really being oppressed. And in the case of a writer such as myself, I also seek the pure workspace of a Library. I want to fill the shelves therein with mountains of documents, have a functional L-shaped desk and a high-class Herman Miller work chair. If I had a space like that, I could maybe write things at twice my current speed. Writing, just writing. So nice. I'm totes gonna write, serious here.

Couldn't you rent a single-room apartment and turn it into a library?

My dear reader, you just don't get this.

A library shines because it's a home. A desk and shelves in an apartment room is a mere workspace. Well, whatever, I know this is hard to understand so I'll give a practical example, something like the workspace of Naoki prize winner author Ishida Ira (you'll find him right away if you search for him on the Internet). Awww, I want to have a free idea GET in a library, too. While I'm there I want to foreign car GET. I guess I also want a watch. I'm also itching for some northern European furniture, and I wish I had a fountain pen that fit my hands well. I want this, I want that. I want everything (what a filthy afterword, this).

If you have three solar system planets you don't need, please make sure to send them to the Gagaga Bunko Publishing Department.

- Real situation report

I ate a Soumin Champru that I made and puked my guts out.

- Real objectives for this year

I want to work real hard. Thank you very much.

[Editorial department - notice] First edition January 2010. Partial revision March 2012.

This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.